Be inspired every day!

Woman's Weekly®

25 April 2023

BEAUTIFUL BLANKET to crochet

SIMPLE MAKE!

Lisa George

Being on Coronation Street is like working with family, but I'd also love to be in Call the Midwife!

EXPERT-APPROVED WAYS TO

BEAT BACK PAIN

I no longer have to hide who I am

MOVING REAL LIFE

SAVE 30% ON CRAFT BOOKS

T&CS APPLY. SEE P14

EASY PUD RECIPES you'll love

WITH A WOW FACTOR!

PLUS Super savoury tarts

FUTURE

CLEVER GARDENING

TOP PLANTS for late spring colour

BEST BIENNIALS

VISIT…

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

Cotton
TRADERS
Pip's
Lemon Shirt
£38
#PatternPark
The style of your life
cottontraders.com

Hello!

Out with the old…

> *Our very old tumbledown home sits on the side of a hill, and had a hugely overgrown front garden, leading down to a narrow lane. We cleared a lot of undergrowth and overgrown shrubs, then, regretfully, nature also gave a helping hand by blowing down two aged trees in a gale. Suddenly, we have a number of vacancies, ideally for easy, colourful plants that might wish to take up residence. So, my attention was drawn to our feature on page 42, which is full of great ideas.*
>
> *By the way, look out for the next Woman's Weekly Healthy Living magazine, which is in the shops now.*

Geoff

EDITOR
geoffrey.palmer@futurenet.com

COVER PHOTO: ALAMY. PHOTOS ON THIS PAGE: FURNITURE & CHOICE, FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM, SHUTTERSTOCK. *T&CS APPLY

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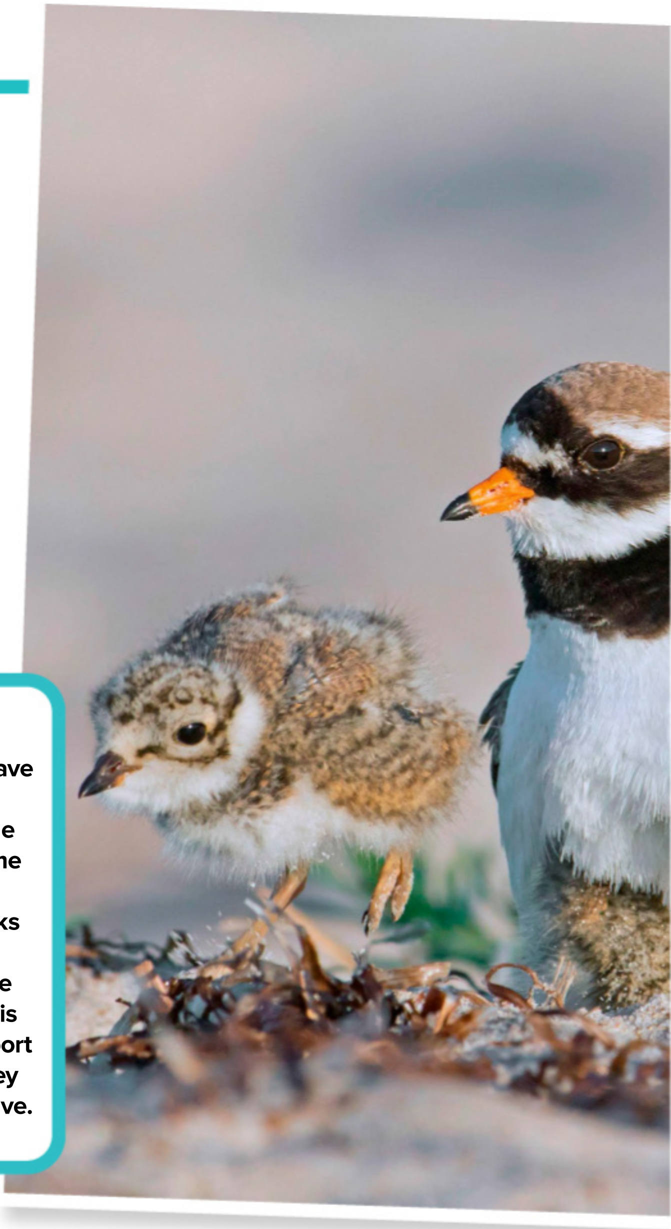
Woman's Weekly
EXTRA MAGAZINE
CORONATION SPECIAL
How to CHOOSE THE RIGHT BRA
EASY ENTERTAINING
WIN
LOVABLE TOY to knit
PRETTY KEY HOLDER to make

FROM US TO YOU

Good to SHARE

A feel-good musical, a plain-looking pooch and plovers making a comeback



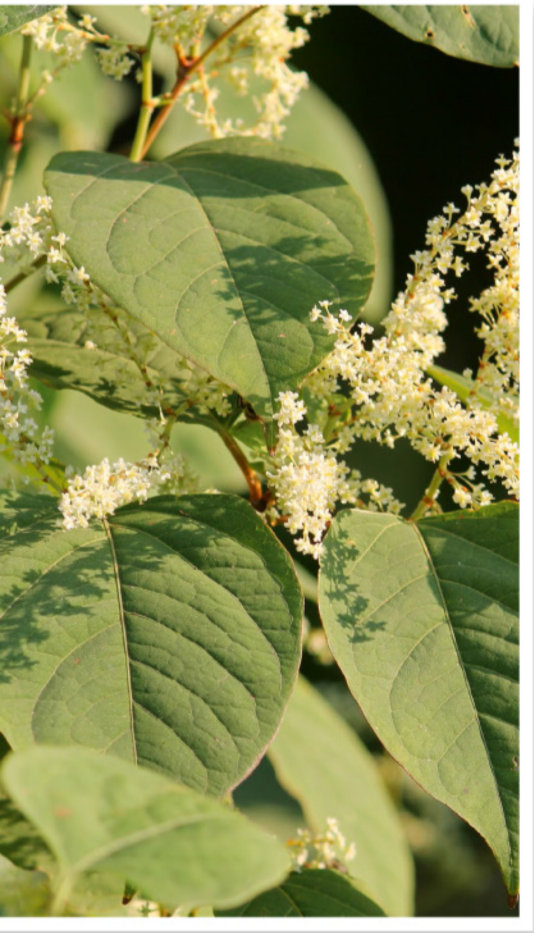
Baby boom

The ringed plovers of Alderney have had a golden year, with a record number of fluffy chicks born at the last breeding season. This outcome is largely due to newly protected areas for nesting sites. Nine chicks from six breeding pairs fledged successfully. The population is the last in the Channel Islands, and it is hoped that with the ongoing support of the community and the Alderney Wildlife Trust, these birds can thrive.

*** Visit alderneywildlife.org**

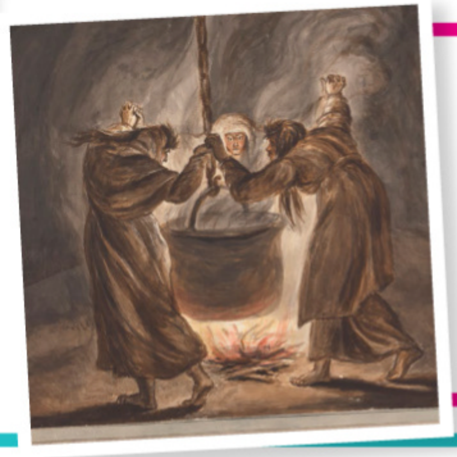
Did you know?

Wild elephants need just two hours of sleep a night, making them the lightest snoozers of the animal kingdom. By contrast, koalas are by far the sleepiest mammals, as they tend to slumber for a whopping 22 hours each day!



A KNOTTY PROBLEM

Can you recognise Japanese knotweed? Knowing what to look for is important, as the invasive species spreads quickly and damages buildings. Its reddish-purple shoots emerge in spring, resembling asparagus spears, while its rolled-up dark green or red leaves open out into heart shapes with pointy tips, and flower tassels appear in late summer. If you spot it in your garden, find out how to treat it at gov.uk



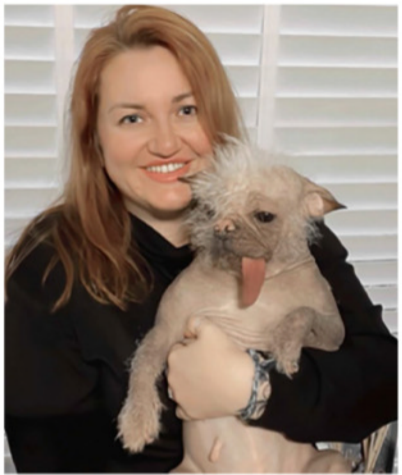
On this day in history

'Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn and cauldron bubble…' Shakespeare's famous play of witchcraft and treachery, *Macbeth*, was first performed in public at the Globe Theatre on 20 April 1611. Legend has it that Shakespeare researched real spells when writing his witches' chants, which include the powerful ingredients of fenny snake, eye of newt and toe of frog.

WORDS: ANNABEL KEMP. PHOTOS: ALAMY, GETTY, INSTAGRAM @CHUG_LIFE, JMA PHOTOGRAPHY. PRICES CORRECT AT TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

DIAMOND IN THE WUFF

Meet Peggy, recently crowned the winner of the UK's ugliest dog competition, who's owned by Holly Middleton. A cross between a pug and a Chinese-crested breed, the 'chug' from Yorkshire won the nation over with her lolling tongue and hairless body.



HELLOOOO, LONDON!

Full of heart and laugh-out-loud moments, *Mrs. Doubtfire the Musical* opens at London's Shaftesbury Theatre from 12 May. Out-of-work actor Daniel is desperate to see his kids after a messy custody battle. Inventing an alter ego – Scottish nanny Mrs Doubtfire – might just be the answer.

* Book tickets from £30 at mrsdoubtfiremusical.co.uk

Mrs. Doubtfire
The New Comedy Musical

ARTS FOR ALL

Live music, theatre, literature and more exciting events await at the Norfolk and Norwich Festival from 12-28 May. It kicks off with a weekend of free events, with pop-up performances, including dance trapeze and wire-walking from the Gorilla Circus at the city's Festival Gardens. Find full details at nnfestival.org.uk

Money saving tip

A kettle full of limescale uses more energy to boil water than a clean one. Help it to run more efficiently by descaling it every two months or so. Fill the kettle with half white vinegar and half water, boil and repeat. Leave it to soak overnight if the scale is especially stubborn.

NATURE NOTES

From Louise Midgley

Nothing it seems, fazes an ant, least of all its own diminutive size. The saying may be 'as busy as a bee' but ants are undeniably super busy too; these active little creatures are the miniscule bodybuilders of the insect community. Quite how they haul such hefty items across the deep cracks and crevices of my garden, which defies their physical being, can only be put down to steely determination and invisible muscles, like Popeye's. I watched a single ant lift, drag and push a dead black beetle, triple its own size, across my uneven brick patio this morning. Truly remarkable!

My garden week

I cut back all the frosted growth on my collection of penstemons this week, leaving just the new growth at the base of each plant. I'm looking forward to a flush of summer and autumn colour.

FROM YOU TO US

Good to SHARE

We love to hear what you've been up to, so do get in touch!

Letter of the week

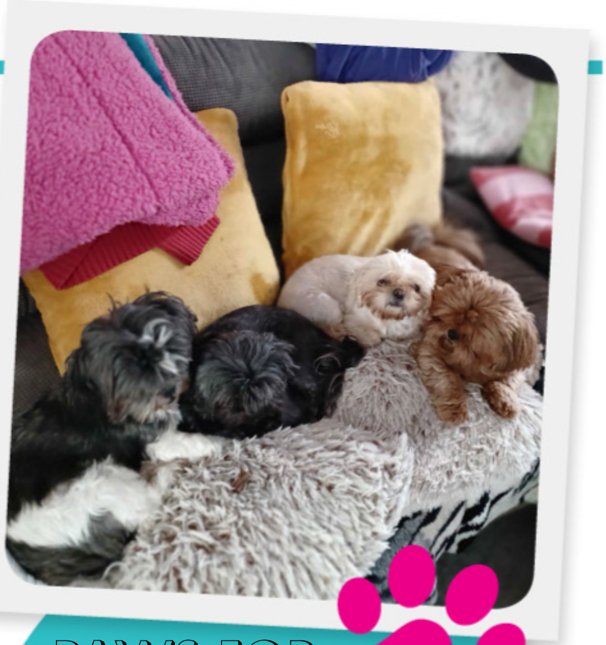
A salute to Cicely

Many *Woman's Weekly* stories bring a smile to my face, but 'Flower Fairies' [14 February issue] topped them all. *The Book of Flower Fairies* was given to me when I was five (I am 90 now!) by a wonderful aunt who shared her love of flowers with me through Cicely Mary Barker's beautiful pictures and poems. Anyone who doesn't know Cicely's books should get one right away – I still enjoy mine.
Valerie Ruddle, Sevenoaks

Flower FAIRIES

Jenny didn't have a great track record with her brother's girlfriends. Would his latest be any different?

'Don't judge… Give her a chance'



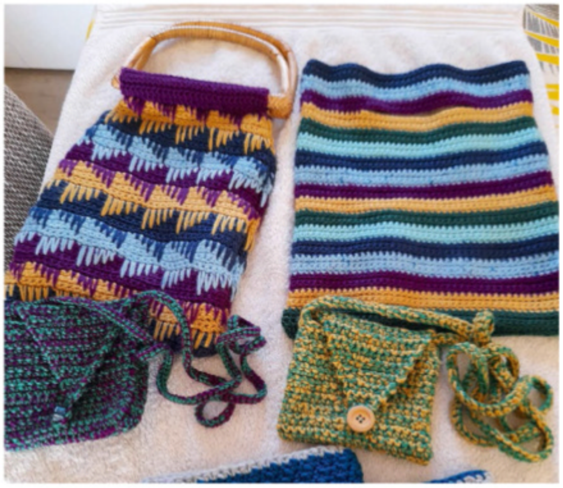
PAWS FOR THOUGHT

I absolutely live for my dogs. The eldest is Princess Kizzy; her daughter Rosie is the shy one. Then there's Honey and, last but not least, Jaffa (a chocolate-orange colour, hence his name). I can't seem to get a proper photo of the four of them together but they love everyone.
Wendy Cartwright, Devon

✱ Got a pet pic that makes you smile? We can give it a good home

LOOK WHAT I MADE

I had lots of oddments of wool left over from various items I had made, so decided to use them up by making bags. Now just got to find a home for them!
Sally Boyd-Robinson, Churchdown



GET IN TOUCH

WE LOVE LETTERS

***Woman's Weekly*, Future plc, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR.**

P.S. It really helps when you put your details in capitals.

✱ We do not return photos (apart from You Wore It Well) so please do not send originals.

EMAIL US

womansweeklypostbag@futurenet.com

Tell us your full name, address and daytime phone number, please.

FOOD FOR FRIENDS

Good to know

Meal deals

Taste, not WASTE

These kitchen tips will help save both food and energy costs – the perfect combination!

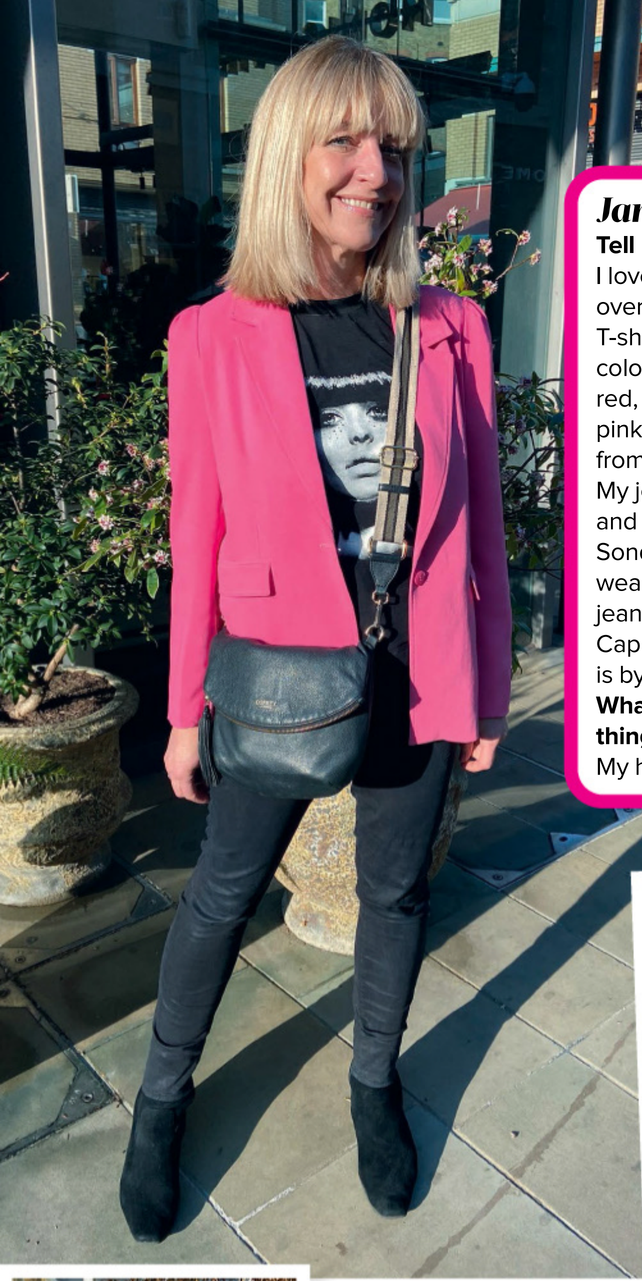
Air we go

Neat heat

I thought your 'Taste, not waste' kitchen tips [24 January issue] were very useful. They've helped me save on food and energy costs, so I'd like to share a tip of my own. At the weekend, I do a big bake, my friends do the same, then we swap dishes and freeze them. We have fun seeing who can be the most creative. As you have a selection of different meals, they never get boring, and it saves money and time, as you only need to defrost and reheat them. Win-win!
Joanne Wilkinson, Sheffield

Important! All contributions to *Woman's Weekly* must be original and NOT duplicated to other publications. £25 will be paid to the writer of the 'Letter of the week' for all rights in each letter printed. The Editor reserves the right to modify any letter. Future plc reserves the right to reuse any submission to *Woman's Weekly* in any format or medium, including social networking sites. We regret that we cannot enter into personal correspondence. Photos of children under 18 must be accompanied by written permission of a parent/legal guardian. All details correct at time of going to press.

What you're WEARING



Jane Medd, 48

Tell us about your look
I love a jacket thrown over jeans and a funky T-shirt. I also love bright colours – particularly red, cobalt blue and hot pink. This jacket came from a local boutique. My jeans are J Brand and my T-shirt is by Sonder Studio. I usually wear a heeled boot with jeans. These are by Caprice and my bag is by Osprey.

What's your favourite thing about yourself?
My hair.

Jayne Scandrett, 62

Tell us about your look
Clothes have to be comfortable and practical but still on trend. I love this dress by K-Design. It's a striking print and so easy to wear. My leather biker jacket is by Orice Style. It always adds a cool vibe. My suede boots are Leona and my bag is by LS. I own a small boutique so I buy wholesale and I'm always looking for exciting new labels.

What's your favourite thing about yourself?
My legs.

Rachael Clifton, 33

Tell us about your look
My cotton trench coat is a recent buy from By Malene Birger. The perfect transitional piece for spring, I love its oversized shape and wide sleeves. Underneath, I'm wearing a cream knit two-piece from H&M. I have a love of beige, cream and tan! I also like to mix designer with high-street finds.

What's your favourite thing about yourself?
My height – I hated it when I was young, but I now love being tall.

Hannah Smith, 38

Tell us about your look
Being a mum, my look has to be very practical – but I still love to add some colour. I bought this coat from Zara last year. It's such a vibrant shade of green and very cheery! Underneath, I'm wearing a navy sweater by Olive with a lace blouse from Boden. My jeans are M&S, the boots are by Blundstone and my bag is Longchamp.

What's your favourite thing about yourself?
Being a mum!

YOU WORE IT WELL

Maureen Simmons, 1960

Here I am aged 17, with my two young cousins, Kim and Diane. We were all dressed up for the christening of their baby brother, Mark, to whom I was godmother. I was wearing a white slim-fitting shift dress, which I bought at a shop called Martin Ford. Happy days!

✱ We'd love to see how great you looked in any era up to and including the 1980s. Please send a good-quality photo with your name, address and daytime phone number clearly written on the back, to: Fashion Dept, *Woman's Weekly*, Future plc, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR. Photos will be returned.

'I'd love to be in *Call the Midwife!'*

Coronation Street's Lisa George on acting, what's next and the importance of her health

Lisa as Corrie's Beth with husband Kirk, and (left) Rovers Return barmaid Glenda

Most TV viewers will know her as outspoken factory worker Beth Sutherland in Corrie, yet Lisa George appears worlds away from her on-screen character when *Woman's Weekly* sits down for a chat with her.

The actor has been a hit with viewers of the show for over a decade but confesses she is mindful not to get complacent in the acting world. 'Well, you don't know what's going to happen,' she says when pressed on whether she'd ever consider leaving the famous cobbles.

'I was watching the ITVX drama *Nolly* [about *Crossroads* actor Noele Gordon], who was the first woman on colour television. But they got rid of her when she was 61. It's fascinating because she made it her life and then they just discarded her. So you always have that at the back of your head,' she says.

Despite still embracing life on Corrie, the 52-year-old star is careful to keep her options open, and admits a historical drama has always been a dream of hers. 'I'm obsessed with anything from the 1940s and 1950s, so I'd love to be in *Call the Midwife*,' she says.

'I really want to be in period stuff because I find it very interesting. I'm a vintage queen, and I collect antiques. You could say I live in the wrong era,' she quips. What's more, Lisa reveals that it was a beloved family member who instilled her love of times gone, explaining, 'I was so close to my grandparents, and when my grandfather died, we found his diaries from his time during World War One.

> 'You could say I live in the wrong era'

'It was heartbreaking to read, especially where he wrote, "I spent 20 hours digging a trench" or "so-and-so was blown up"', she recalls.

Lisa became a *Coronation Street* regular in 2011, and loves the sense of camaraderie on the set. 'You become a family – it's like a silent code,' she says of her workmates in fictional Weatherfield. 'What I love is that if we're ever at an awards ceremony, everybody always looks out for each other. We're very close, and people really care'.

The star explains how spending long hours filming together has forged intimate bonds, particularly among the female cast members. 'You're with each other 24/7. We're quite a tight little posse, and the girls have a WhatsApp group. If there is anything we need support with medically, we'll say "You need to see this gynaecologist" or "Try this doctor".

With skating partner Tom Naylor in *Dancing on Ice*

THE Woman's Weekly INTERVIEW

'There are so many of us going through the menopause at the moment that we're all talking about our symptoms, and what HRT we've tried,' she adds.

The health-conscious actor explains that she is virtually teetotal as she 'can't stand being drunk'.

'I'm not much of a drinker and I never have been. I don't like alcohol very much. I'll have a couple of glasses, but only once in a blue moon,' she reveals. 'It was Ali King's birthday recently [Lisa's Corrie co-star Alison plays Carla Connor in the soap], and I had one tipple, but prior to that, I hadn't had any alcohol since Christmas.'

> *'Even if I was having a lazy day, I'd get on my treadmill'*

Having had three family members battle prostate cancer, the 2020 *Dancing on Ice* contestant monitors her wellbeing closely. Lisa explains, 'What I found out is that it can be linked to breast cancer, which is what my nana died of at 52.

'I was very paranoid so I had the BRCA gene test, but the results were reassuring,' she confides.

Thankful for the successful treatment of her grandfather, dad and uncle, Lisa walked 11,000 steps each day in March in support of Prostate Cancer UK – and behind the gesture lay great significance. 'The 11,000 steps represent the 11,000 men who die each year from prostate cancer, but I really enjoyed the challenge,' she reflects. 'Maybe it's an endorphin rush. Even if I was having a lazy day, I'd get on my treadmill and turn on the telly.'

✱ *Coronation Street* is on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays on ITV1.

WORDS: JULIE ANN TRAINOR. PHOTOS: ALAMY, SHUTTERSTOCK

CELEBRATING BRITAIN

WALKS *of wonder*

Pull on your hiking boots and explore the riches of our wonderful historic pathways

With summer just around the corner, the UK's historic paths and National Trails are a great way to enjoy stunning scenery and visit some famous sights. Here are a few of the trails you can take – whether it's a leisurely stroll for part of the way or as the setting for a full-on hiking holiday.

WORDS: ANDREW SHAW. PHOTOS: ALAMY, GETTY

Scottish National Trail

Taking in two national parks, the 537 miles of this stunning trail run the length of Scotland – from the rolling hills of the Scottish Borders in the south to Cape Wrath in the wilds of the far north. As well as taking in the capital city Edinburgh, the gentler early stages pass sights such as the magnificent Melrose Abbey (pictured), founded in the 12th century. Further north, the glens and rugged heather-clad Highlands are home to numerous ruins and castles, including the dramatic Ruthven Barracks at Kingussie, which were built after the Jacobite rising of 1715.

✱ Visit scottishnationaltrail.org.uk

The Ridgeway

Known as 'Britain's oldest road', the Ridgeway has been used by travellers for 5,000 years. Starting at Overton Hill, Wiltshire, and ending at Ivinghoe Beacon, Buckinghamshire, its 87 miles take in some of England's most historic landmarks. Highlights include the amazing megalithic stone circle at Avebury, the Iron Age hill fort of Liddington Castle, and the dramatic Bronze Age Uffington White Horse (pictured), cut into the chalk hills. There are also several nature reserves along the trail and, at this time of year, the Chiltern woodlands are carpeted with a breathtaking display of bluebells.

ULSTER WAY

This circular walking route covers 625 miles and makes its way through all six counties of Northern Ireland. Walkers can choose from 26 sections, all of which offer something special. In County Fermanagh, a gentle trail explores the 18th-century Florence Court estate and gardens (pictured), while the North Antrim Cliff Path takes you to the world-famous Giant's Causeway. The Ballynure to Belfast section passes Carrickfergus Castle, one of the best preserved medieval structures in Ireland. Belfast itself has the fascinating Titanic Experience, which tells the story of the iconic ship and its links to the city.

✱ Visit walkni.com

Llwybr Arfordir
Trefdraeth
8 m
Newport
Coast Path

Pembrokeshire Coast Path

Lying almost entirely within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, this path has some of the most stunning maritime scenery in Britain. Walkers follow the undulating clifftop trails past secluded beaches, castle ruins and charming fishing villages. The path begins in St Dogmaels in the north of Pembrokeshire and stretches 186 miles to Amroth in the south. Along its route, nature lovers can enjoy the amazing diversity of wild flowers and birdlife, as well as seal pups in autumn. Man-made structures include the 13th-century St Govan's Chapel – a tiny hermit's cell built into the rock by the water's edge.

For more information on National Trails in England and Wales, visit nationaltrail.co.uk

THAMES PATH

This gentle trail follows Britain's best-known river for 185 miles from its source in the Cotswolds, through the heart of London, to Woolwich in the east. After passing through quaint villages with rose-covered cottages, the route leads to the university city of Oxford, then on to royal palaces Windsor Castle and Hampton Court. Downstream from Teddington Lock, the path splits in two, and walkers can explore either the north or south banks of the river. Some of the famous sights include Kew Gardens, the Houses of Parliament and the Tower of London (pictured below).

Pennine Way

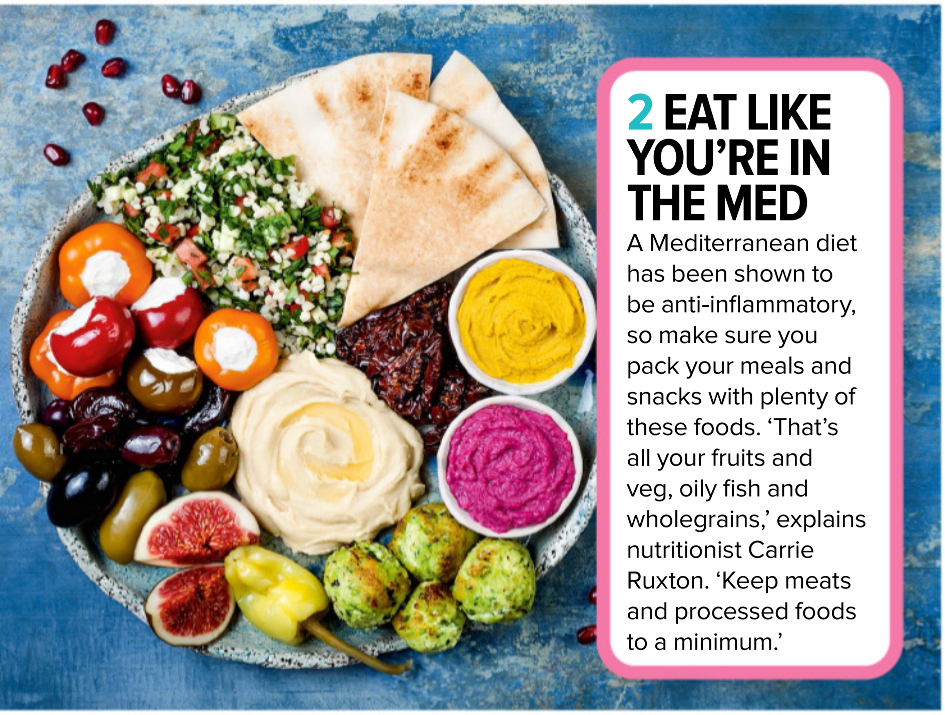
Stretching 268 miles from the Derbyshire Peak District to the Scottish Borders, this trail isn't for the faint-hearted. Parts of it are recommended for experienced walkers only. However, there are less demanding sections, such as the evocative, windswept moors around Haworth. The trail also passes Top Withens, the remains of a farmhouse said to be the inspiration for Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. One of the most dramatic (and challenging) parts of the trail is Stage 13. Running 22 miles from Greenhead to Bellingham, its ups and downs follow the imposing Hadrian's Wall for eight miles.

14 ways to beat a bad back

Follow these easy expert tips for keeping your spine strong and pain-free

1 START YOUR DAY WITH THE PLANK

Strengthening the muscles that support your back – which is your core – can beat and prevent back pain. Exercises like the bridge and plank are great. Find out more at mindyourbackuk.com



2 EAT LIKE YOU'RE IN THE MED

A Mediterranean diet has been shown to be anti-inflammatory, so make sure you pack your meals and snacks with plenty of these foods. 'That's all your fruits and veg, oily fish and wholegrains,' explains nutritionist Carrie Ruxton. 'Keep meats and processed foods to a minimum.'

3 DON'T SIT FOR MORE THAN HALF AN HOUR

Regular movement is essential to keep your back flexible and strong, so get up and move around. Just a walk to the kitchen to make a cuppa helps. And try these stretching exercises while you wait for the kettle to boil:

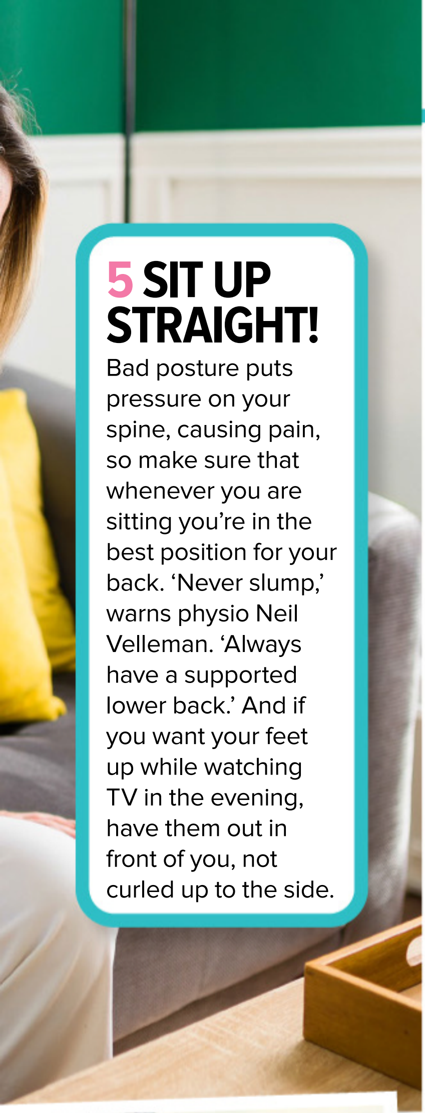
- Stand tall and hug your body – right hand on left shoulder and left on right. Breathe in and out to stretch your back.
- Shrug your shoulders and try some torso twists to ease tension in the spine.

4 WEAR SHOE INSERTS

Shock-absorbing insoles can help improve your posture and reduce the impact on your spine when you are on your feet for long periods – walking or standing.

TRY...

Enertor Comfort Insoles, £36.99, enertor.com. The shock-absorbing arch improves posture and reduces pain in the lower back.



5 SIT UP STRAIGHT!

Bad posture puts pressure on your spine, causing pain, so make sure that whenever you are sitting you're in the best position for your back. 'Never slump,' warns physio Neil Velleman. 'Always have a supported lower back.' And if you want your feet up while watching TV in the evening, have them out in front of you, not curled up to the side.

6 QUIT SMOKING – TODAY!

What are you waiting for? Cigarettes are linked to a host of health conditions, including lower-back pain. 'Smoking can affect the circulatory system, which delivers nutrients and hydration to the spinal discs,' says Stephen Wanless, associate professor at Birmingham City University. For help quitting, call your local NHS Stop Smoking Service on 0300 123 1044 or visit nhs.uk/smokefree – they can offer support, apps and aids, such as nicotine patches and vaping.

7 GO FOR A WALK

Even 10 minutes a day can make a difference. It will help strengthen your back to prevent pain and get things moving to ease a bad back. Most lower-back pain would improve with walking. 'Inactivity can cause back pain,' warns Carrie. 'If you don't move about, you stay still, and you won't actually get blood flowing to that area to start the healing process.'

8 HAVE A GLASS OF MILK

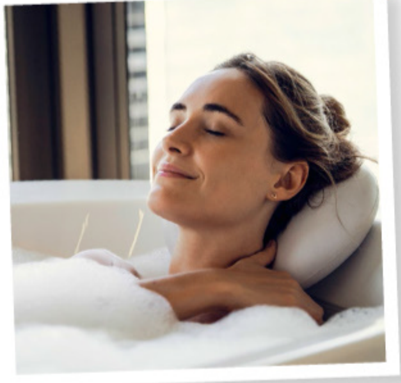
Calcium-rich dairy foods help to build strong bones, thus reducing the risk of osteoporosis, one of the leading causes of back pain in older women. Vitamin D is important for bone health too, so get outside without sunscreen for a bit each day to top up your levels, or consider taking a supplement to avoid a deficiency.

9 NEED TO LIFT SOMETHING?

Make sure you do it in a way that protects your back. Squat down by bending at your knees and hips only, and slowly lift by straightening your knees and hips, not your back. 'Use those leg muscles,' says Neil. 'Hips, knees and legs are built for pressure – your back isn't.' If you're lifting something heavy, reduce pressure on your back further by keeping the load close to your body.

10 TRY THE TOWEL STRETCH

Back pain? Try this trick from osteopath Michael Fatica*. Lie face up with a rolled-up towel at the base of your spine, for two to five minutes, to restore the natural curve. Repeat as often as needed throughout the day.



11 TAKE A BATH BEFORE BED

A warm bath can help relieve tension and cramping. Just add a handful of BetterYou Magnesium Flakes, £9.95 for 1kg, lloydspharmacy.com, to top up your levels of this natural muscle relaxant. 'The mineral works to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes feelings of calm and relaxation,' says Harley Street nutritionist Kim Pearson.

12 HAVE A MASSAGE

It can help to relieve muscle tension, increase blood flow to soft tissue and soothe aches and pains. Can't afford a treatment? Try a spot of DIY with this foam roller, £14.99, mymeglio.com

13 BEND PROPERLY

Protect your back when bending throughout the day, especially when doing regular jobs, such as housework or gardening, which can destabilise your spine over time. 'Keep your back neutral and your core (tummy muscles) engaged,' advises Neil. 'Pivot from the hips to bend, and use your knees rather than letting your back collapse.'

14 SLEEP WITH A LEG PILLOW

Are you a side-sleeper? Your back pain may be caused by your top leg falling forward and twisting your pelvis and lower back. A special leg pillow, or simply popping a normal pillow between your knees, can keep your lower body aligned to ease the pressure.

TRY...

JML Contour Legacy Leg Pillow, £19.99, Boots. Ergonomically designed to remove stress from your hips, knees and lower back.

JML
CONTOUR
LEGACY
LEG PILLOW
The ergonomically designed leg pillow for all-night comfort & support
SQUEEZE ME!
The only leg pillow that does it all!

WORDS: TANYA PEAREY. PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY.
IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP

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*FROM BACKINSHAPEPROGRAMME.COM, AN ONLINE REHABILITATION PROGRAMME – SEARCH 'BACK IN SHAPE PROGRAMME' ON YOUTUBE

Woman's Weekly Craft Book Club

Save 30%

This month, we've chosen some of our absolute favourite books from Search Press – and even better, you can save 30% on all of them for one week only, plus free postage (UK only).

Esme Clemo, Craft and Home Editor

Lynne Rowe, Knitting and Crochet Editor

We're both passionate about all sorts of craft, so we've pulled together a selection of fabulous books, which we hope you'll like. We will be bringing you other great offers throughout the year, so look out for them.

Lynne Rowe
Betsan Corkhill
Knit Yourself Calm
£9.99, Club price £6.99

***Knit Yourself Calm* by Lynne Rowe and Betsan Corkhill**
Every project has been designed to promote calm and mindfulness.

TAKE TWO FAT QUARTERS Gifts
Wendy Gardiner
£9.99, Club price £6.99

***Take Two Fat Quarters: Gifts* by Wendy Gardiner**
Use that pile of fat quarters you've stashed away and make 16 fun gifts for your loved one.

100 flowers to knit & crochet
Lesley Stanfield
£12.99, Club price £9.09

***100 Flowers to Knit & Crochet* by Lesley Stanfield**
A delightful collection of designs, including flowers, leaves, fruit, veg and butterflies.

Leonie Morgan
BLOCK BY BLOCK CROCHET
£10.99, Club price £7.69

***Block by Block Crochet* by Leonie Morgan**
Four projects to make: a bag, a baby blanket, a geometric cushion and a blanket using patchwork quilt block designs.

Corinne Lapierre
FELT ANIMAL FAMILIES
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***Felt Animal Families* by Corinne Lapierre**
Sew gorgeous felt creatures, including foxes, rabbits, deer and bears, with cute outfits and accessories.

Debbie Shore's
SEWING ROOM SECRETS
Machine Sewing
£9.99, Club price £6.99

***Sewing Room Secrets: Machine Sewing* by Debbie Shore**
Sewing superstar Debbie walks you through every aspect of machine sewing.

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9781782217329	*Take Two Fat Quarters: Gifts*	**£6.99**		
9781800920286	*100 Flowers to Knit & Crochet*	**£9.09**		
9781782219255	*Block by Block Crochet*	**£7.69**		
9781782216223	*Felt Animal Families*	**£6.99**		
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IT'S A FUNNY OLD WORLD

'I stared at the wall, waiting to be inspired'

THIS WEEK'S COLUMNIST **Actor and comedian Helen Lederer**

It all started when a friend told me that a certain company had invented a new shade of green. Everyone in our postcode was talking about it. 'What kind of green?' I asked, as I made good work of my avocado on toast, nestled on a tastefully pale green plate. (Was this a sign?)

'The kind of green that just says 'I'm powerful', she responded. 'You know?'

I didn't, but I felt I should. Personally, I've never been drawn to painting a whole room green as this is only for the very brave – but I was keen to see what this new shade offered. I tracked it down on the internet. Sure enough, it was, well, powerfully green. I immediately sent off for a sample.

A few months before, this same friend had assured me that if I were to look at the colour red for long enough, it would increase creativity. So instead of just buying a red rubber 'stress ball' for deskside inspiration – or even red lipstick – I bought myself a pot of red paint and asked a kind neighbour to paint the wall outside my window. (I couldn't trust myself to do it, as the inevitable red paint spillages about my person and on the pavement could quickly raise alarm.) Once the wall was fully red, I began to stare and waited to be inspired. If it worked, this would be a relatively cheap way of transformation and there might even be a bit left over to beset a bookcase.

> *'The red spillages about my person could raise alarm'*

Unfortunately I quickly became quite bored, and soon was feeling a yearning for the nice pale grey that had been there before. When I voiced my doubts to the neighbour, he told me he really liked the red. But I sensed this could have been because he didn't want to paint over it again.

So, one would think that this error with bold colouring would have taught me a lesson. But no. As soon as the sample pot of powerful green arrived, I attacked a footstool with it. The room was transformed, but not in the way I wanted. I now have an olive green-dotted carpet. (Note to self: use a dust sheet next time.) I can only conclude that my friend who made the recommendation wanted to live vicariously through my colour choices – without having to adventure herself.

I'm not quite over the ordeal. But there is light ahead. I've started to go to bed with my new paint chart, full of kingfisher blues and jaunty yellows. Because frankly, where there are sample pots, there is hope. And all for under a tenner.

*** Helen is founder of the Comedy Women in Print Prize, which took place on 17 April.**

'My funny old week'

WHERE I'VE BEEN A new cafe in my suburb. Suddenly all manner of Turkish tiles and sourdough toasties have transformed our high street into a carnival.

WHAT I'VE BOUGHT Two 'budget' white linen blinds off the internet. I look at them a lot.

WHO I'VE MET A marvellous person who has the best ideas about goody bags. Ever.

WHAT I'VE SEEN A new purple carpet in a social club I occasionally frequent. People have not stopped talking about it.

PHOTOS: ALAMY, SHUTTERSTOCK

NEW

DO MORE
WITH JUST ONE JAR

DEFY 10 SIGNS
OF AGEING
Niacinamide 99% purity

PROTECT
FROM UV RAYS
Lightweight, non-greasy SPF30

HYDRATE
INSTANTLY
For up to 24 hours

OLAY
NIACINAMIDE +SPF30
DAY CREAM

OLAY
FACE ANYTHING

10 OF THE BEST

Brightening EYE CREAMS

These products will help you to de-puff and perk up

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

1 CHILL OUT

Skin icing has many benefits – around the eyes, it will soothe and de-puff. Keep **Botanics Ice Rollers, £16, Boots**, in the fridge, then massage around the eye socket first thing, after applying an eye cream to help the globes to glide.

2 WAKE-UP CALL

Like a double espresso for tired eyes, **PS... Caffeine Eye Serum, £3.50, Primark**, stamps out signs of fatigue. Caffeine is the star ingredient, and kick-starts sluggish circulation to help drain excess fluid so bags look less puffy.

3 ENERGY BOOST

Skin cells get lazy as we get older. The decrease in cell activity spreads to newer surrounding cells, accelerating the ageing process. **Avène Hyaluron Activ B3 Triple Correction Eye Cream, £30, Boots**, has ingredients that help to stop the spread. Haritaki extract protects the skin's hyaluronic acid, while niacinamide prolongs cell longevity to reduce wrinkles.

4 HYDRATION STATIONS

If dryness is your issue, **Olay Hyaluronic24 + Vitamin B5 Eye Gel Cream, £38, Boots**, will quench skin's thirst. With hyaluronic acid, as well as niacinamide and glycerin, the refreshing gel delivers an instant slurp of moisture, as well as strengthening the skin barrier so your skin learns to hold on to moisture and improve hydration in the long run.

5 ENERG-EYES

Revolution Pro Miracle Eye Cream, £8, Boots, has hundreds of 5-star reviews. Why? It claims to energise tired eyes, minimise fine lines and improve dark circles in just four weeks. If you're looking for a does-it-all eye cream, this is a pot of gold.

6 PROTECT AND PERFECT

If you find your eyes get teary and irritable with your usual facial sunscreen, try **Hello Sunday The One For Your Eye Mineral Eye Cream SPF 50, £18, Boots**. It's made with mineral filters, which are kinder to sensitive eyes. It also benefits from peptides that offer a brightening, lifting effect.

7 SPOT OF BOTHER

On top of the usual eye bugbears of wrinkles and dark circles, **Lacura ProNight Advanced Eye Serum, £4.99, Aldi**, also works on dark spots. It contains camomile flower extract, which is known to brighten uneven skin tone.

8 PAMPER TIME

A sheet mask will drive moisture into the skin so the eye area looks well rested, and wrinkles appear softer, plumped with all that extra hydration. Keep **Garnier SkinActive ½ Million Probiotic Fractions Repairing Eye Sheet Mask, £2.99, Superdrug**, in the fridge for a refreshing treat.

9 EYE MESSAGE

The Ordinary Multi-Peptide Eye Serum, £19.90, Boots, is packed with peptides – messaging molecules that 'talk' to skin cells and instruct them to go into repair mode – to target multiple issues such as crow's feet, puffiness and dark circles.

10 SLIGHTLY DOES IT

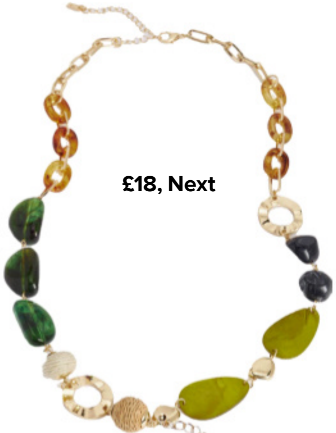
Loading the eye area with your regular face cream can cause puffiness. **Estée Lauder Advanced Night Repair Eye Supercharged Multi-Recovery Eye Cream, £10, Boots**, has a light consistency, and tackles everything from dark circles and puffiness to dryness and fine lines.

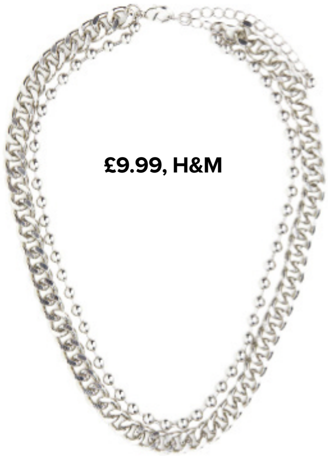
WORDS: STEPHANIE MAYLOR

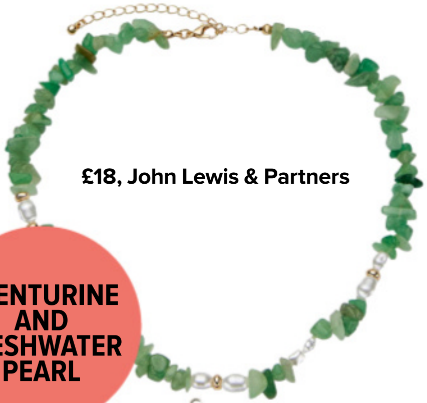
Statement NECKLACES

20 UNDER £20

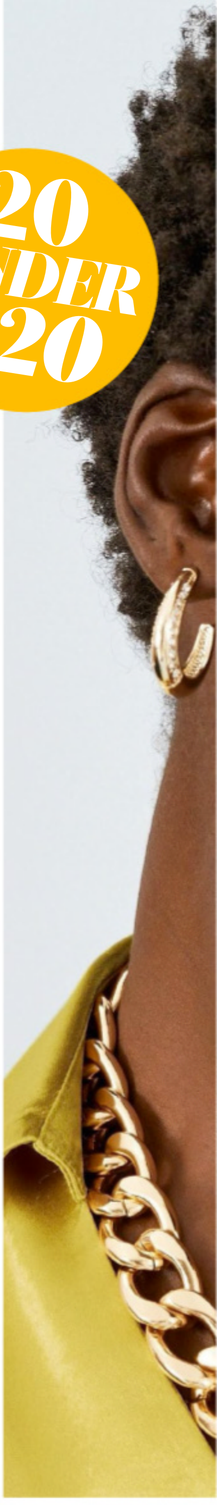
Jazz up a simple T-shirt with one of these stylish gems

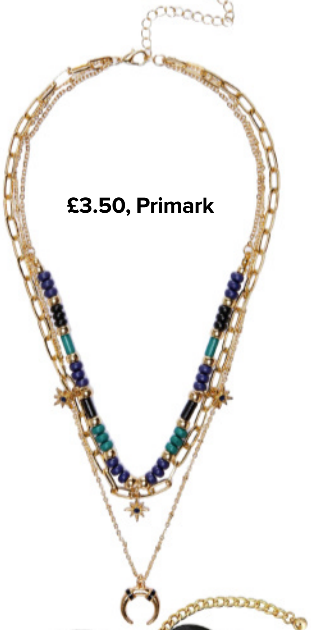

£18, Next

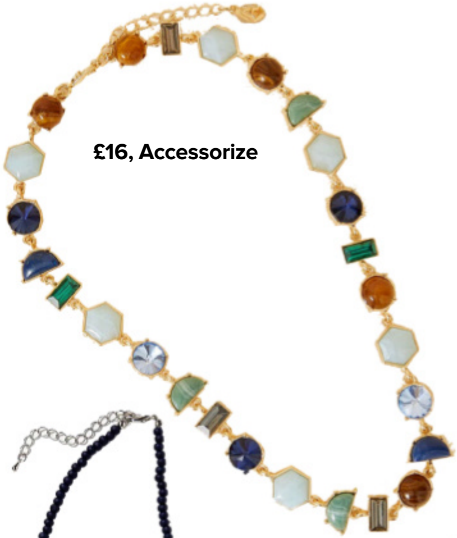

£9.99, H&M

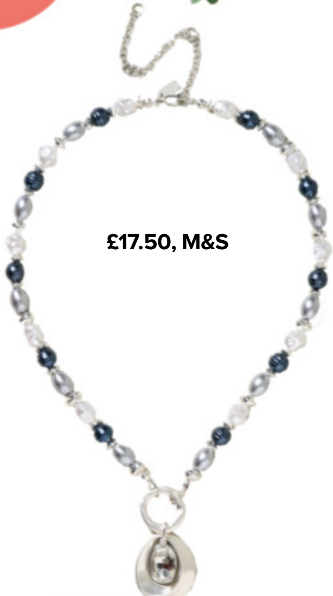

£18, John Lewis & Partners

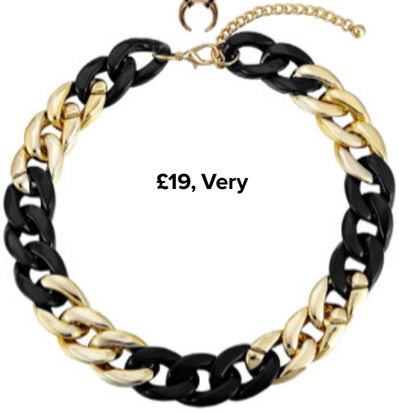
AVENTURINE AND FRESHWATER PEARL

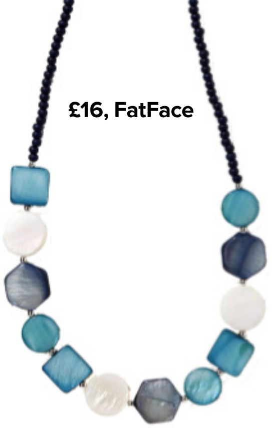


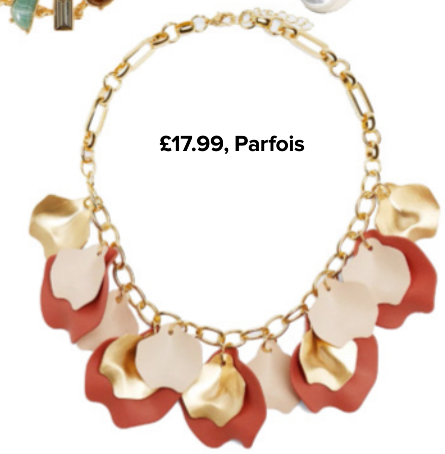

£3.50, Primark

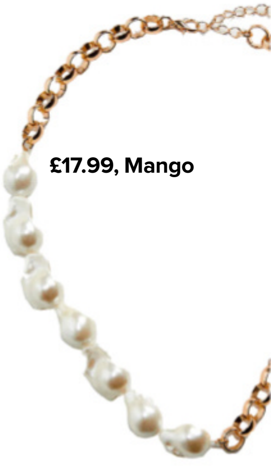

£16, Accessorize


£17.50, M&S

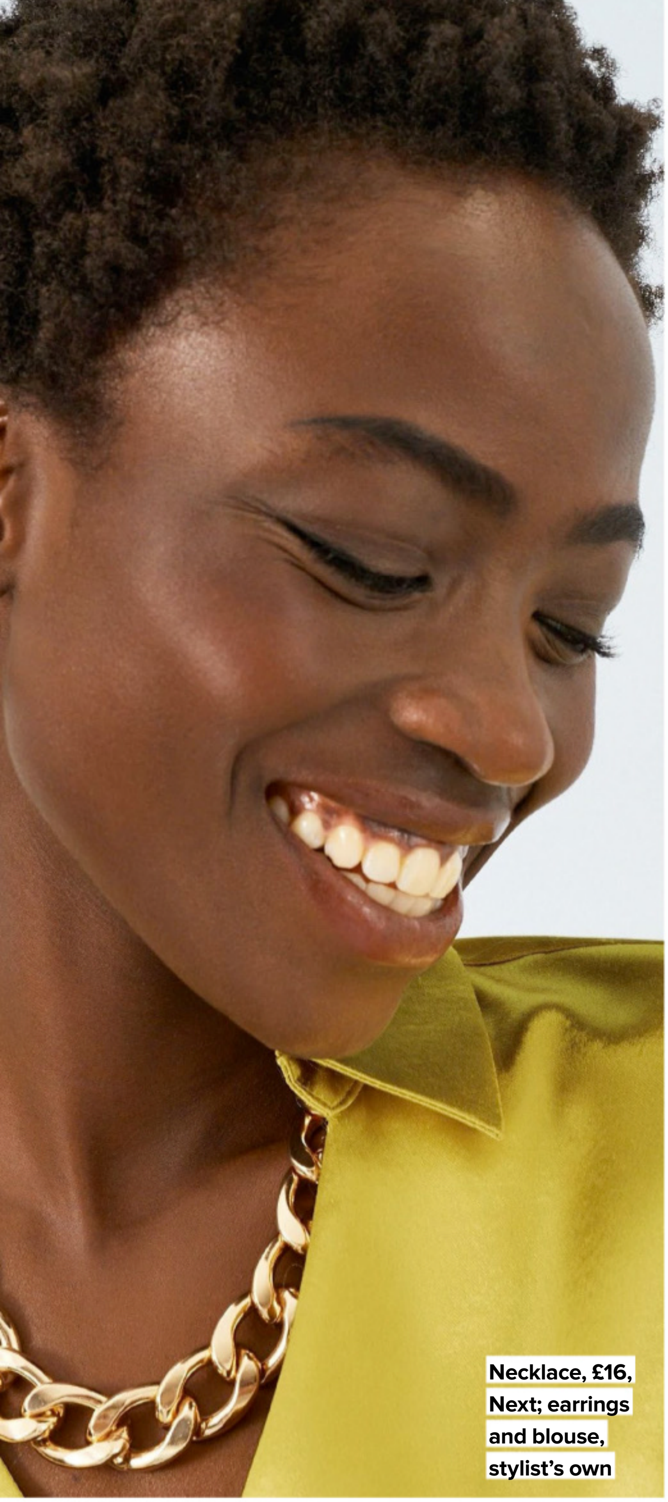

£19, Very


£16, FatFace

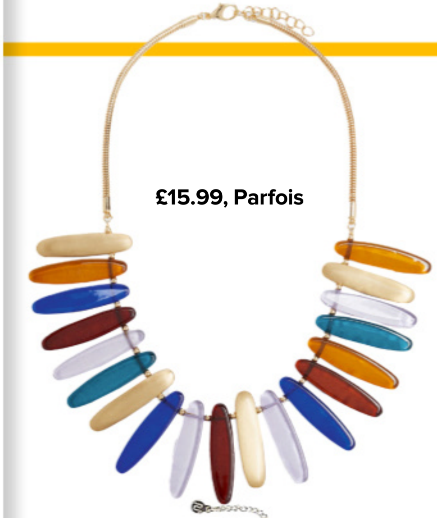

£17.99, Parfois


£17.99, Mango

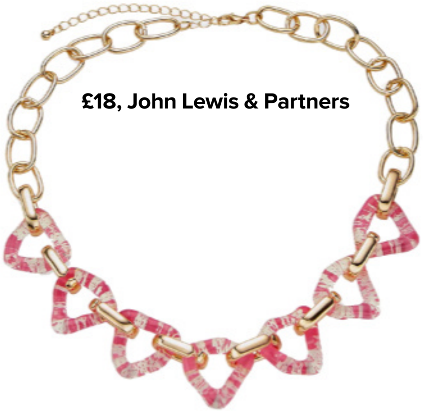
COMPILED BY: CHARLIE BELL



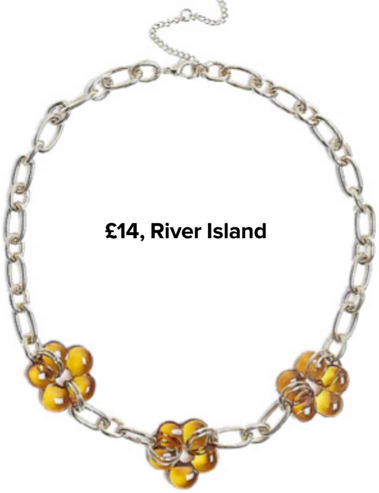
Necklace, £16, Next; earrings and blouse, stylist's own



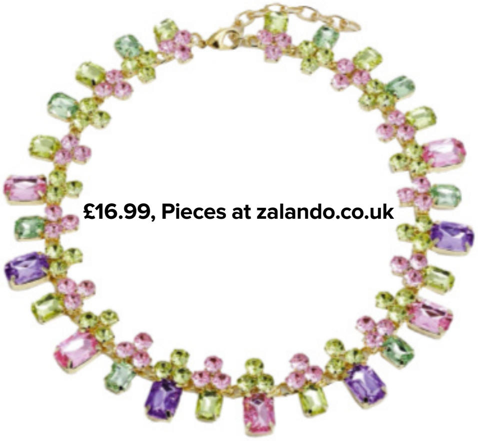
£15.99, Parfois



£18, John Lewis & Partners

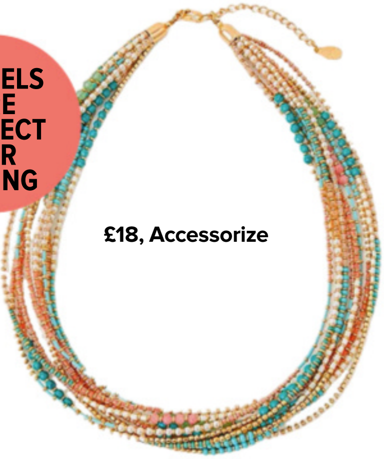


£14, River Island

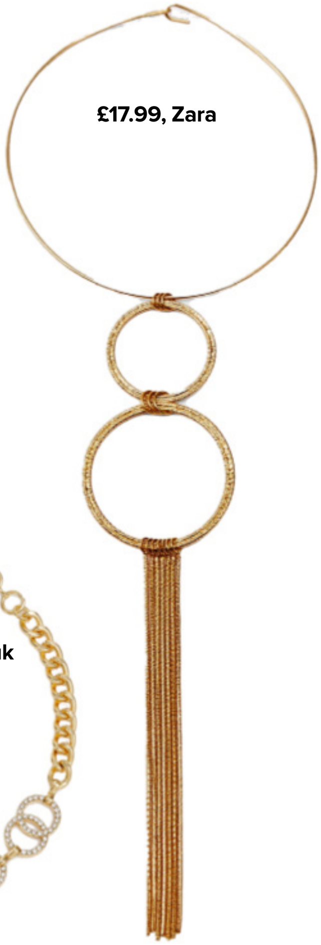


£16.99, Pieces at zalando.co.uk

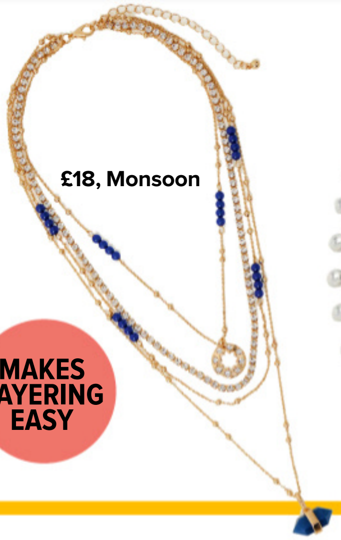
PASTELS ARE PERFECT FOR SPRING



£18, Accessorize

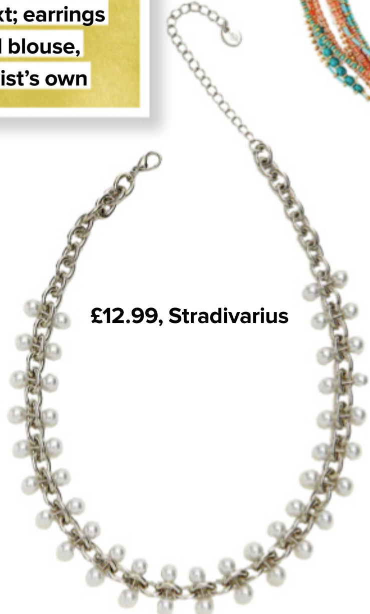


£17.99, Zara

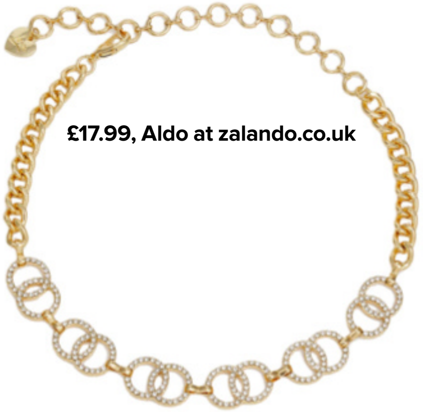


£18, Monsoon

MAKES LAYERING EASY



£12.99, Stradivarius



£17.99, Aldo at zalando.co.uk

We no longer have to hide WHO WE ARE

Three women reveal how they overcame their personal embarrassments

'Accepting my hearing aids took time'

Josie Gamble, 45, Founder of Gamble Designs and Christian Creative Directory and Network, lives in Wolverhampton with her husband Ben, 42, and their three daughters, aged 15, 12 and nine. 'Hey, me too!' I say, lifting up my hair to show the waitress my hearing aid. She touches her own, grins at me, and an understanding passes between us. In that moment, I realise I've finally embraced who I really am.

Mum noticed my hearing loss when I was a toddler; I was diagnosed at the age of three and I received my first set of hearing aids in primary school, aged nine. I hated them instantly – it was hard to adjust and everything seemed so loud. Plus I felt embarrassed that I had to hand a special microphone to the teacher at the start of each lesson.

As I grew, I hated feeling 'different', and used to wear my hair down to cover my hearing aids. Nobody bullied me about them, but I noticed that some people treated me differently once they knew – talking to me as if I was stupid rather than hearing-impaired.

My embarrassment about my hearing aids continued into young adulthood, and I've taken great pains to hide the fact that I'm deaf. Sometimes I've nodded along during a conversation rather than admit I need someone to repeat something – and it has led to a few misunderstandings along the way.

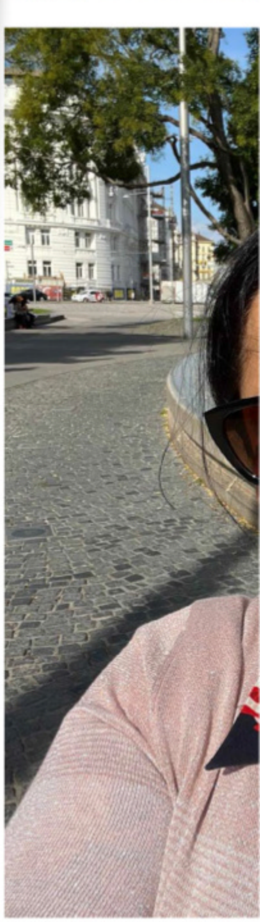
Today, I feel completely different. But there wasn't a sudden 'eureka moment' where I decided to embrace my hearing aids – or at least stop hiding them. Instead, the change has been gradual – something that has happened as I've got older and more confident in my own skin.

'As I grew, I hated feeling different'

As I've moved into my 40s, I've felt more accepting of myself in many ways, and that includes the fact that I wear hearing aids.

In 2022, I won a business award and had to go to the House of Commons to a reception. While there, I noticed one of the waiting staff wore a hearing aid – I lifted my hair and showed her mine and we had a nice chat.

I like to think that reaching out, especially to those who are younger, will help others feel more comfortable about who they are.



WORDS: GILLIAN HARVEY. PHOTO: HANNE BROOKS PHOTOGRAPHY

'I never fit in but learnt to embrace my differences'

Jennifer Cairns, 51, is founder of the Lady Rebel Club and lives in Belfast with husband Sean, 45, and their two sons, aged 17 and 13.

I slipped off my high heels, put my head in my hands and sobbed silently. The other passengers on the aircraft must have thought I was afraid of flying. But really, I was exhausted from hiding.

It was 2008, and despite multiple painful health problems, I'd flown to Manchester from Ireland, to meet a business contact, and had put on a brave face despite being in agony.

Rebel
WITH A CAUSE
Volume 01
Being different doesn't mean being less.
Inspiring true stories from 15 diverse entrepreneurs.

I may look healthy from the outside, but with autoimmune conditions including fibromyalgia leaving me in constant pain, I'm often struggling.

The last thing I wanted to be was different. As a child I never felt I fitted in – unbeknown to me I had autism (only diagnosed in 2019), so tried to behave like everyone else. As an adult, also suffering from tics and seizures, I hid my problems again – not wanting people to think I wasn't capable of my job.

'I was hiding an incredible strength'

There's only so long you can keep things hidden before they simply become too much. For me, the pressure built in late 2019, when my husband Sean, now 45, had a stroke and was in hospital for a few weeks. Two months on, in early 2020, I was diagnosed with a rare blood cancer, for which I will need lifelong treatment.

Just before the pandemic hit, I told my mum, Joyce, now 72, what I'd been going through. 'Why didn't you tell me before?' she asked, and I simply didn't have an answer. Telling Mum was liberating, and I realised I didn't need to be ashamed. After all, I had achieved so much despite my illnesses. Surely I wasn't hiding a weakness, but an incredible strength.

I began to write and by 2021, I had the draft of a book, *Rebel with a Cause* – aimed at women like me who may be different but are amazing in spite or even because of it – it was released in October 2022. I also started Rebel World – a company that aims to advocate for women and all marginalised gender entrepreneurs who are neurodiverse or have disabilities.

Hiding things is no longer my way – I'm determined to be proud of my uniqueness, strength and resilience. And to help other women in my situation feel the same way.

Yasmin's happy to get her exercise on foot

'Society puts pressure on us'

Yasmin Shaheen-Zaffar, 51, is a psychotherapist and lives in Otley, West Yorkshire.

Whenever I hear the expression 'It's as easy as riding a bike', I can't help but smile. Because I know that for some of us, that's not easy at all.

I was given my first bike at around seven years old, but whereas my friends seemed to ride with ease, I was wobbly and hated the sensation of being in the saddle. When, in 1977, a local child was knocked over on our road, my parents didn't want me to ride in public spaces – so I just stopped trying altogether.

In my teens, friends would sometimes expressed surprise when I told them I couldn't ride a bike, but I never felt ashamed. It was only when, aged 19, a boyfriend laughed and called me an unrepeatable name when he found out that I began to feel a pang of shame about it.

As an adult, my lack of riding expertise didn't affect me – until my daughter Verity, now 18, was born. I felt sad that I couldn't ride a bike with her as she grew, and even took lessons for a time with her in 2013. But I could never get a handle on it – and hated every minute.

'I found out that I have dyspraxia'

It was only when I started a postgraduate qualification in counselling at Leeds Beckett University in 2017 that some light was shed on my situation. There was a huge disparity between my written grades and my practical ones, and it simply didn't make sense.

The university ran tests and I was diagnosed with dyslexia, and also found out that I have dyspraxia – a condition that affects movement and coordination. Suddenly, I understood why I found riding a bike so difficult.

After my diagnosis, I booked another one-on-one session with a cycling instructor. He was very patient and I was able to ride a little. Then I came to a new realisation – I don't actually enjoy riding. I suddenly wondered why I was putting all this pressure on myself.

Sometimes I think that the society in which we live makes us feel we have to conquer everything, every skill, but it's simply not true.

These days, although I love watching the Tour de Yorkshire, which goes along my road each year, I stay away from two wheels. And I don't feel even a bit ashamed!

Super savoury VEGGIE TARTS

Seasonal bounty partners pastry in these tasty ideas

Courgette and ricotta puff tartlets

So easy to put together, with a delicious honey and hazelnut topping, these are the perfect portion size.

PER SERVING
435 cals, 10g fat, 3g sat fat, 51g carbs

MAKES 6 PREP 15 mins COOK 20 mins

- 320g sheet puff pastry
- 1 medium egg, beaten, or 2tbsp milk
- 250g ricotta cheese
- Grated zest and juice ½ lemon
- 50g Parmesan, finely grated
- 1 large courgette, sliced to 5mm rounds
- 2tbsp olive oil
- Few sprigs thyme leaves
- 2tbsp honey
- 50g hazelnuts, toasted and roughly chopped

1 Heat the oven to 160C Fan/Gas 4.Unroll the pastry and cut into 6 x 12cm squares. Using a knife, mark a narrow border around each and thoroughly prick the area within it – this will help prevent the middle from puffing up. Brush borders with egg or milk, place the squares on a baking sheet and bake for 5-6 mins until starting to colour.

2 Mix together the ricotta, lemon zest and juice, and the Parmesan. Season well.

3 Remove the pastry squares from the oven, and divide the ricotta mixture between them, spreading out across the inner squares. Divide up the sliced courgettes on top of the ricotta and drizzle with a little oil. Sprinkle over some thyme leaves.

4 Return the tartlets to the oven and bake for 12-15 mins until golden brown and cooked through.

5 Remove from the oven. Drizzle over the honey, and sprinkle over chopped hazelnuts and more thyme.

COOK'S TIP

Mix a spoonful of pesto into the ricotta for an extra zing of flavour.

Spring onion and feta filo spiral

The milder flavour of this green salad staple works a treat in this lighter-tasting bake.

PER SERVING
428 cals, 29g fat, 13g sat fat, 25g carbs

SERVES 6 PREP 30 mins COOK 35-45 mins

- 60g butter
- 4tbsp olive oil
- 3 bunches salad/spring onions (approx 350g), cut into 5cm lengths
- 300g spinach
- 200g feta, crumbled
- 50g Pecorino cheese, finely grated
- 20g fresh dill, chopped
- 2tbsp fresh breadcrumbs
- 270g pack filo pastry
- 2tbsp sesame seeds
- Tomato and basil salad, to serve

YOU WILL NEED

- 20cm springform cake tin, the base lined with baking paper

1 In a large pan over a medium heat, melt 30g of the butter with 1tbsp of the oil. Fry onions for 5 mins until soft and slightly caramelised. Stir through the spinach to wilt. Take off the heat and allow to cool.

2 Heat the oven to 180C Fan/Gas 6. Strain the spinach, pressing out any excess liquid. Mix the feta, Pecorino, dill, breadcrumbs and spinach mixture together.

3 Melt the remaining 30g of butter and oil, and brush the sides of the cake tin.

4 On a clean work surface, lay 3 sheets of filo in a row, short edges overlapping a little. Brush well with butter then top with 3 more sheets and brush with more butter.

5 Spoon the filling in a rough log shape along the edge of the pastry closest to you. Carefully roll up to completely encase the filling, then brush the pastry with butter. Starting at one end, carefully coil the long roll into a tight spiral. If any tears occur, patch them with pieces of the remaining filo sheet, brushed with butter. Put the spiral into the lined tin. Sprinkle over the sesame seeds.

6 Bake in the oven for 35-45 mins until golden brown. Remove, allow to cool for 5 mins, then take the spiral out of the tin and serve with a tomato and basil salad.

PER SERVING (FOR 6)
366 cals, 24g fat,
9g sat fat,
30.5g carbs

COOK'S TIP
If you're vegan, just avoid all-butter puff pastry – check the label as most brands are dairy free.

Upside-down tomato tart

Similar to a tarte tatin, the flaky pastry tops the filling during baking, keeping it crisp and the vegetables sweet and caramelised.

MAKES 6-8 PREP 15 mins COOK 2 hrs

- 800g baby plum tomatoes
- 2 red or orange peppers, cut into strips
- 1 red onion, cut into wedges
- 3tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1tbsp Aleppo pepper (pul biber) or ½tbsp chilli flakes, plus extra
- 3tbsp caramelised red onion chutney
- 130g pitted green olives
- 375g sheet puff pastry

YOU WILL NEED

- 25x35cm roasting tin, lined with baking paper

1 Heat the oven to 140C/Gas 3. Mix the tomatoes, peppers and onion with the oil. Season generously with sea salt and bake for 1 hr 30 mins, mixing occasionally.

2 Remove the tomato mixture from the oven and increase the oven temperature to 180C Fan/Gas 6. Tip the mixture into a sieve set over a bowl, to drain off the cooking juices.

3 In a separate bowl, mix the Aleppo pepper (or chilli) and chutney, then fold through the tomato mixture and the olives.

4 Spread the mixture evenly over the base of the lined roasting tin. Unroll the puff pastry sheet over the top. Tuck the edges neatly into the tin and use a fork to prick the pastry all over, so the steam can escape. Bake for 35 mins until the pastry is golden.

5 Leave to cool for 3 mins. Hold the board over the tart and flip to invert it, then carefully peel away the baking paper from the top of the roasted veg layer. Serve warm, cut into squares, along with a made salad on the side, if you like.

COMPILED BY: ROSE FOOKS. RECIPES AND PHOTOS: FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM

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Last year, 16.6%* of new cars sold in the UK were electric – two women share the pros and cons of greener driving

Is now the time to get an ELECTRIC CAR?

YES

Moira, 74, says we need to commit to the environment.

After extensive research, my husband and I bought an electric car last October. The horrifying impact of petrol and diesel on the environment was the reason for our decision; we wanted to be part of the solution and contribute towards a cleaner environment. We were lucky we could afford it – I know not everyone can.

It took nine months for our car to arrive – factories are facing huge delays at the moment – and it hasn't exactly been plain sailing since then. After a stressful trip to Norfolk – where they didn't seem to have heard of electric cars – I almost sent it back. The infrastructure around charging EVs is severely lacking at the moment. You can arrive at a supermarket to find just one charging point with three cars waiting. And prices have risen alarmingly. In January, it suddenly shot from £25 to £50 to recharge the car. But if people don't switch now, there won't be an incentive to install fully working, well-run charging units across the country. It's a chicken-and-egg situation.

The Government's plan to ban new petrol and diesel cars by 2030 is too little, too late. We need to bring it forward to ensure change happens now. Do I regret purchasing an electric car? No. If you're prepared to be part of the solution, then it's absolutely worth it.

> 'We want to contribute towards a cleaner environment'

NO

Jane, 56, says the cost outweighs good intentions.

I've owned numerous cars over the decades. My last one was a Mercedes, but I soon realised the error of my ways. I loved it, but this diesel-guzzling beast chugged out huge amounts of the worst kind of fumes. It didn't feel ethical, and I sold it during the pandemic – I wasn't travelling anywhere and I was spending money on tax and insurance, which seemed foolish.

I'm now car-free. I would love to buy a sustainable vehicle but I can't justify the price. Even the cheapest electric car costs around £22,000, and due to the higher cost of living at the moment, it will have to form an orderly queue behind all my other household bills.

On top of the initial cost, it's around £1,000 to install a charging unit at home, and recharging an electric car is almost as expensive as is it to as fill a tank of petrol at the moment.

Add to that the fact that the incentives that the Government initially brought in to encourage people to start buying them have now finished, it all means I've been priced out of the electric car market. So, unfortunately, now is not the time for me.

For the present, I will continue to rely on public transport to get me from A to B. The electric car landscape needs to change to make it more affordable for everyone. Only then will I be able to make the move from petrol to electric.

> 'I've been priced out of the electric car market'

✱ Let us know your opinion by emailing womansweeklypostbag@futurenet.com

WORDS: HELENA CARTWRIGHT. PHOTO: GETTY. *STATISTIC FROM THE SOCIETY OF MOTOR MANUFACTURERS AND TRADERS (SMMT)

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Free health MOT available in participating stores, England only. Waist circumference & BMI checks optional. The NHS Blood Pressure Check Service is for adults aged 40+ that do not currently have a diagnosis of hypertension, adults under 40 that have a recognised family history of hypertension (at the Pharmacist's discretion) and adults referred by the GP for the measurement of blood pressure. Subject to availability.

Your *wellbeing*

LATEST HEALTH SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR MIND AND BODY

3 WAYS TO...

Help tinnitus

1 PROTECT YOUR HEARING
'Prolonged exposure to loud sounds is the most common cause of tinnitus,' says audiologist Rob Ormerod*. And it can aggravate symptoms too, so reduce the volume when listening to music through headphones to the lowest setting.

2 TRAIN YOUR BRAIN
Cognitive behaviour therapy and muscle relaxation are techniques that can help train your brain to ignore the sound in your ears. See your GP for a tinnitus diagnosis.

3 PLAY MASKING SOUNDS
White noise or waves, rain or forest sounds can distract your brain from the ringing in your ears. Have regular hearing checks – find out more at bayfieldsopticians.com

USING A DOG-WALKING APP CHANGED MY LIFE

Gail Walters, 50, from Alton, Hampshire

I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure in 2021. I had a busy life as a full-time carer to my two autistic teenagers, as well as looking after my aunt who'd recently had a second stroke. I knew I'd been overeating to cope, and knew I had to do something to change things.

A friend and fellow dog owner recommended the Biscuit Pet Care app. By looking after your dog, including walking them, you can earn points to spend with a selection of retailers and pet wellbeing businesses.

The Biscuit app made a huge difference to my life. Walking has become an important part of my routine for managing my mental health and helping control my overeating.

I'm also having therapy and the app comes up in every therapy session. Making lists and journaling is good for my mental health too, and I have a special diary where I note down all my Biscuit walks and steps.

My dog Dafni is a huge comfort to me. I love being able to monitor our walks and I look forward to them now, rather than seeing them as a chore. It's great seeing the route view and knowing how far we've walked, and it motivates me to walk for at least an hour a day, which is more than I've ever done before. I've reduced my blood sugar to a prediabetes level and some weeks Dafni and I can walk up to 35km! I've also earned £50 of supermarket vouchers and £20 for a pub lunch.

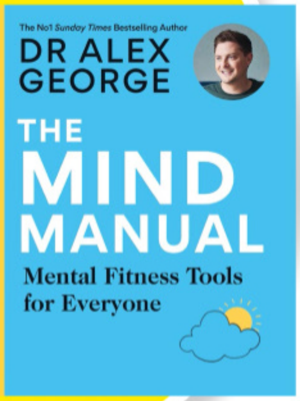
If someone had told me a year ago that an app could change my life, I'd have laughed at them. But it really has been a lifesaver.

*** Biscuit is a free-to-download app for Apple and Android smartphone users.**

NEW READ

THE MIND MANUAL
(£14.99, ASTER)

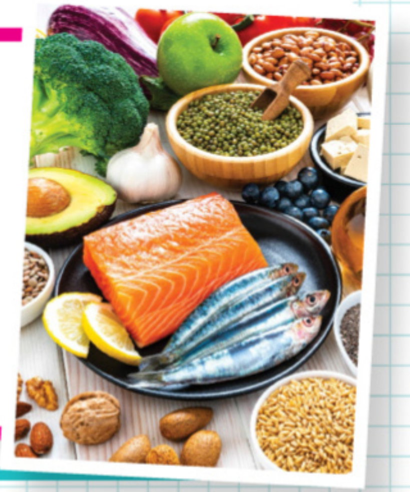
Mental health matters! Learn how to assess yours, as well as learn some simple techniques to improve your mind so that you thrive, not just survive. Written by TV's Dr Alex George and drawing on his experience as a practising doctor and mental-health advocate, this guide will help with anxiety and stress.


The No1 Sunday Times Bestselling Author
DR ALEX GEORGE
THE MIND MANUAL
Mental Fitness Tools for Everyone

Newsflash

MEDITERRANEAN DIET MAY LOWER YOUR RISK OF DEMENTIA

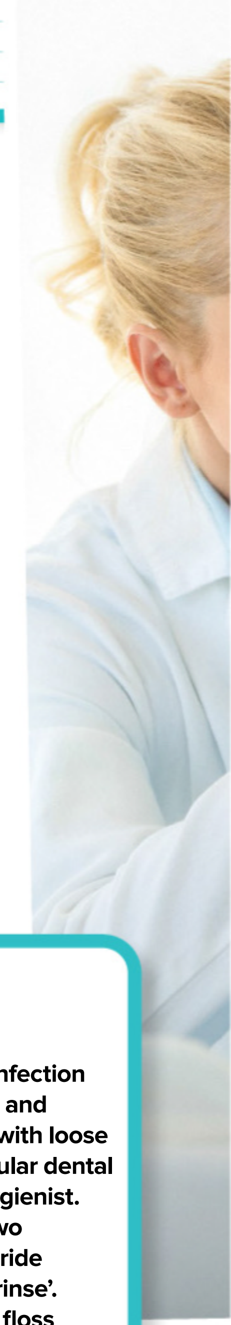
Eating a diet rich in fruit and veg, nuts, seafood, wholegrains and olive oil can help protect against a decline in brain function, according to a study by Newcastle University. Researchers say sticking to a Med-style diet and eating very little red or processed meat may cut your dementia risk by up to 23%.



WORDS: TANYA PEAREY. PHOTOS (POSED BY MODEL): GETTY. *FROM BAYFIELDS OPTICIANS AND AUDIOLOGISTS. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP

Doctor Gill

ADVICE FROM OUR WOMAN'S WEEKLY DOCTOR



Coping with DENTAL INFECTION

Problems with the soft tissue of the gum, around a tooth or within its pulp can cause considerable pain

Dental infection is common but often settles if mild. Symptoms include pain in the area or specifically when biting down on the affected tooth, headache, bad taste or breath, and swelling of the gums.

See a dentist if you have a toothache that lasts more than two days and doesn't go away when you take painkillers, or if you have a high temperature, pain when you bite, red gums, a bad taste in your mouth or if your cheek or jaw is swollen.

Don't go to your GP, as they won't be able to give you dental treatment. If you feel it's serious and immediate action is required, consider going to A&E, especially if you have toothache plus the area around your eye or your neck is swollen, or if the swelling is making it difficult for you to breathe, swallow or speak. You may have developed an abscess – a build-up of pus in the teeth or gums caused by infection. It needs urgent treatment by a dentist and won't go away on its own.

For urgent attention in an emergency or out of hours, you should call your dentist – if they're closed, their answerphone or voicemail may tell you what to do. If you don't have a dentist or can't get an emergency appointment, call 111 for advise.

For mild cases, first try self-care actions such as taking painkillers, like aspirin, ibuprofen and paracetamol or codeine (children under 16 shouldn't take aspirin or codeine). Ask your pharmacist for advice and try rinsing your mouth with salt water – children shouldn't try this. Get pain-relieving gel for your mouth from pharmacies or

Ways to prevent it

✱ ORAL HYGIENE Dental infection starts with unhealthy gums and cracked or damaged teeth with loose or broken fillings. Have regular dental checks and then see the hygienist.

✱ BRUSH TWICE A DAY Two minutes' brushing with fluoride toothpaste and 'spit, don't rinse'. Clean between teeth using floss or interdental brushes every day to remove food, debris and plaque.

✱ CHECK YOUR BRUSH Ideally, use a toothbrush with a small head and medium-texture bristles. Replace it when worn (every one to three months). Powered brushes are best. Don't use mouthwash straight after brushing.

✱ GENERAL HEALTH MATTERS Poor diet, smoking, alcohol or recreational drugs (such as cocaine or speed) affect gum health. Chronic diseases such as diabetes and immune disorders are risk factors needing careful management.

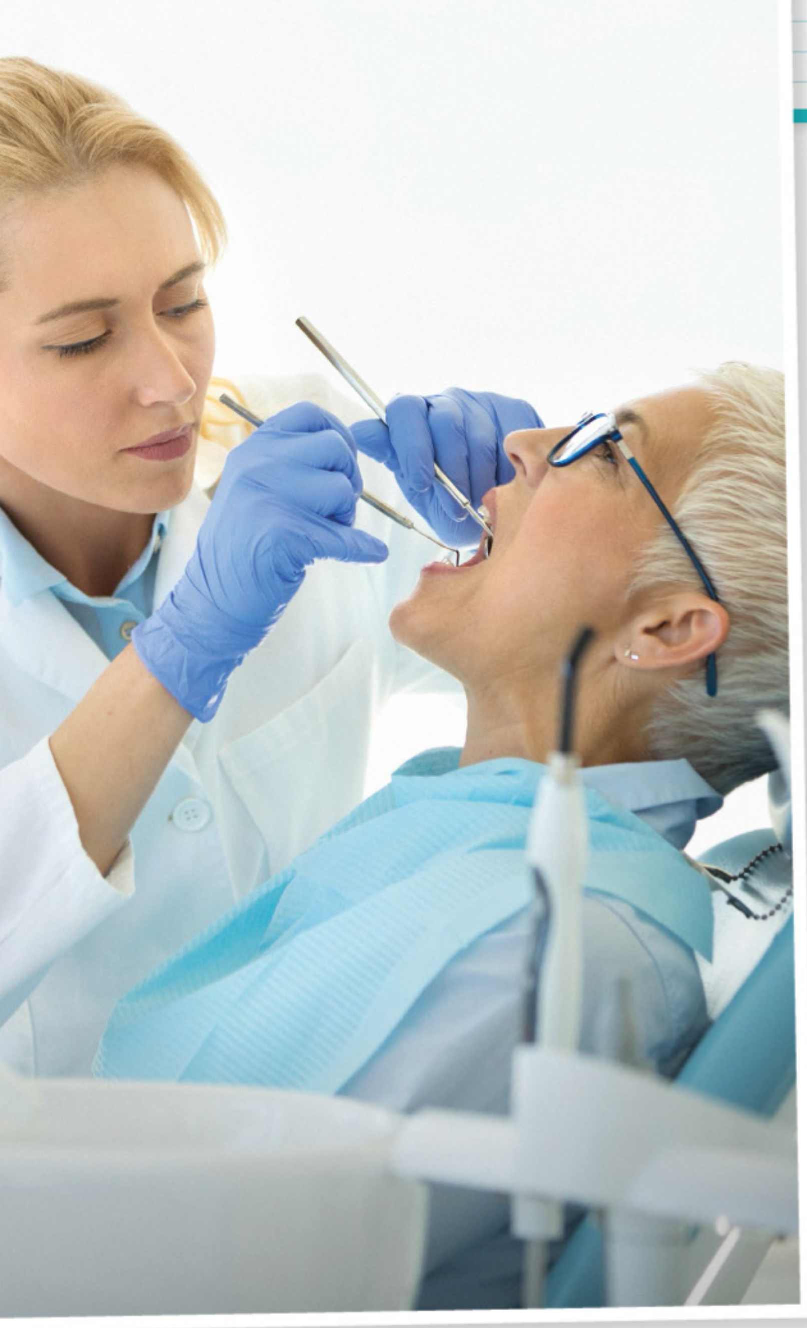
Tattoo safety

Wales is introducing a mandatory national licensing scheme for tattoo artists and practitioners in body piercing, semi-permanent make-up, acupuncture and electrolysis. The scheme by Public Health Wales aims to reduce infections, eliminate poor working practices and create a register for licensed practitioners and approved premises. Good standards of hygiene are essential as risks from unhygienic conditions around tattooing and piercing, or dirty needles, include transmission of blood-borne viruses – such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV.

HYDRATION AND YOUR HEALTH

New data suggests that drinking enough water may slow the effects of ageing, reduce disease risk and increase our lifespan. Using serum sodium as a marker for hydration, researchers for the global Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities study* found that levels above 142mmol/L were associated with a 39% increased risk of developing chronic diseases and dying younger, as well as up to 50% greater likelihood of being 'older' than one's chronological age.

PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK. *SOURCE: *THE LANCET*. DR GILL IS UNABLE TO OFFER INDIVIDUAL ADVICE OR SEE INDIVIDUAL PATIENTS. ADVICE GIVEN HERE IS FOR GENERAL INFORMATION ONLY. SEEK HELP FROM YOUR GP IF YOU HAVE A MEDICAL PROBLEM



supermarkets. Eat soft foods, like yogurt or scrambled eggs, and try to avoid chewing on the side of your mouth that contains the sore tooth. Don't eat foods that are sweet, very hot or very cold, and don't smoke – it can make some dental problems worse.

Infection may also happen when a tooth (such as a wisdom tooth) has broken the skin, but hasn't enough space to fully come through. Dental abscesses are usually treated by a dentist. The dentist will drain away the pus and if a problem with your tooth has caused the abscess, you may need root canal treatment or the tooth may be removed, usually after the surrounding area has been numbed with injections of local anaesthetic. You may need antibiotics.

Abscesses are more common if you have weakened immunity, such as from chemotherapy or radiotherapy, or poorly controlled diabetes.

True or false?

You can wash burns on the skin with milk

False. Ideally, you should cool the burn under cold running water for at least 20 minutes and, if it's a chemical burn, wash out the chemical. Only if you don't have access to water or urgent healthcare,should you consider using other harmless liquids (ones that you could drink, such as milk or cola). Unless very minor, you should then seek urgent medical care.

4 FIXES FOR...

Intestinal worms

1 **WASH YOUR HANDS** Before you eat or prepare food, or after touching soil or using the toilet. Thoroughly wash garden-grown fruit and vegetables, and don't walk barefoot in high-risk areas.

2 **AVOID MEAT THAT'S UNDERCOOKED** Raw or undercooked beef, pork or freshwater fish (such as salmon or trout) may contain baby worms, especially in parts of the world with inadequate food hygiene standards

3 **BE CAREFUL WITH WATER** In high-risk areas (places without modern toilets or sewage systems), drink bottled water, and boil water before drinking or using in cooking.

4 **MAINTAIN PET HYGIENE** Give dogs and cats worming treatments regularly. Don't let children play in areas where there's pet poo.

Q *Why is my husband having abdominal aneurysm screening but not me?*

A Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA), swelling of the main blood vessel in the tummy, often causes no obvious symptoms, but if left to get bigger, it could burst, causing life-threatening bleeding. About 80% of people who have a burst AAA die before they get to hospital or don't survive emergency surgery to repair it. Screening can pick up an AAA before it bursts and, if one is found, you can choose to have regular scans to monitor it or surgery to stop it bursting. The screening test is quick, painless and reliable, spotting swellings in the aorta early on when they can usually be treated, halving the risk of dying from an AAA. In England, screening for AAA is offered to men during the year they turn 65 because men aged 65 or over are most at risk of developing them. It's not routinely offered to women simply because they are at lower risk.

Lifeboats

‘I’LL BE THERE TO HELP PROTECT LIFEBOAT VOLUNTEERS AT SEA. WILL YOU?’

Chris Huxley – proudly leaving a gift in his Will to the RNLI

‘It was horrendous. For 2 days and 2 nights we were at the mercy of the sea. I was with four friends, sailing from England to France. We were all seasick. Seasick and frightened.

‘We never forgot the relief we felt when the brave Newhaven lifeboat crew came to the rescue. It all happened 50 years ago – and the lifeboat volunteers are still on a mission to save every one today.

By leaving a gift in my Will, I’m helping to ensure they’ll be there tomorrow, with the kit and training they need to save lives and come home safely.

‘I’ll be there, right beside the crew when lives are on the line. And you can be there too.’

6 in 10 lifeboat launches are only possible thanks to gifts in Wills. RNLI volunteers rely on people like you and Chris to keep them safe. When we receive your gift, your name will be added to the side of a lifeboat, so you’ll be by their side on every launch.

Three easy ways to request your free RNLI Gifts in Wills Guide:

1. **Return** the attached form below
2. **Visit** RNLI.org/WW
3. **Call** 0300 300 0062

Photos: RNLI/Nigel Millard, Lynda Huxley

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To receive a free, no-obligation Gifts in Wills Guide, fill in the form below and send to:
‘Freepost RNLI WILLS’ (no stamp or other address details required)

Title: Full Name:

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Keep in touch

Your support saves lives, and we look forward to keeping in touch with you by post and phone, sharing our news, activities and appeals.

Would you like to receive our emails and text messages too?

☐ **Yes, I’m happy to hear from you by email**
☐ **Yes, I’m happy to hear from you by text**

Even if you have received our communications in the past, we’ll make sure we honour the preferences you express here.

If you would rather not hear from us, or would like to change how we contact you, please get in touch. Just visit **RNLI.org/preferences** or call **0300 300 9918**.

ABZLGA067

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), a charity registered in England and Wales (209603), Scotland (SC037736), the Republic of Ireland (CHY 2678 and 20003326), the Bailiwick of Jersey (14), the Isle of Man (1308 and 006329F), the Bailiwick of Guernsey and Alderney, of West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 1HZ

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Here to help

LET COUNSELLOR KEREN LIGHTEN YOUR LOAD

I'm a people pleaser

Q I always take on too much and say yes to people. I struggle to say no unless I have a good reason. I find myself feeling resentful and wishing I had more time to myself, so I need to do something about it, but what?
Hilary, London

A You're not alone in struggling to say no. What happens when someone asks you to do something? Do you say to yourself you want to please them – or that you don't want to upset them? My hunch is it's the latter. If it's the former, you're unlikely to feel resentful.

I have a few ideas of things you can do. The first step is to work out what you want and what space you need for yourself. The second is to tell others what it is you need, so they're aware that you plan to do things differently. Next, think about what exhausts you, then practise saying no in those areas. It will give you more space and time to try it out and gauge others' reactions. Finally, try out the word 'no' and find a way to say it that sounds genuine while also creating a boundary.

Our relationship expert Keren Smedley has over 20 years' experience. Keren welcomes your letters, emails and texts, but she cannot reply to individual cases and will select correspondence at random for publication.

Can I trust her?

Q My 16-year-old daughter has started meeting up in the evening with her friends. She tells me where they're going, but the plans always seem to change. She sometimes texts me when out, but often tells me when she gets home. I'm not sure I can really trust her as she isn't always staying within the rules.
Leanne, London

A It's very normal for plans to change when you're in your teens. The fact that she tells you what she's been doing is, without doubt, a plus. It's important to praise her for her communication and tell her how much you appreciate her letting you know. You then need to agree the rules and what she needs to do if the friends' plans change and are out of her boundaries. At the same time, make sure you try to give her a bit of freedom while keeping her safe.

I don't want to move in with him

Q I've lived on my own for over 20 years. I've met a lovely man and he wants me to move in. I really want to be with him, but I'm not sure about living with someone, as I need my space. How do I tell him without him feeling rejected?
Name and address withheld

A Just like you've told me. You sound very clear about what you need and that it isn't anything to do with this man. That said, you may be able to find a compromise that works for both of you – such as you having a separate room that you can go to when you need space. Let him know that this isn't you rejecting him. Alternatively, you could try it out. Move in for a month to see how it feels and where the tension points are. Then talk about ways you can smooth out any wrinkles.

He's dismissing my emotions

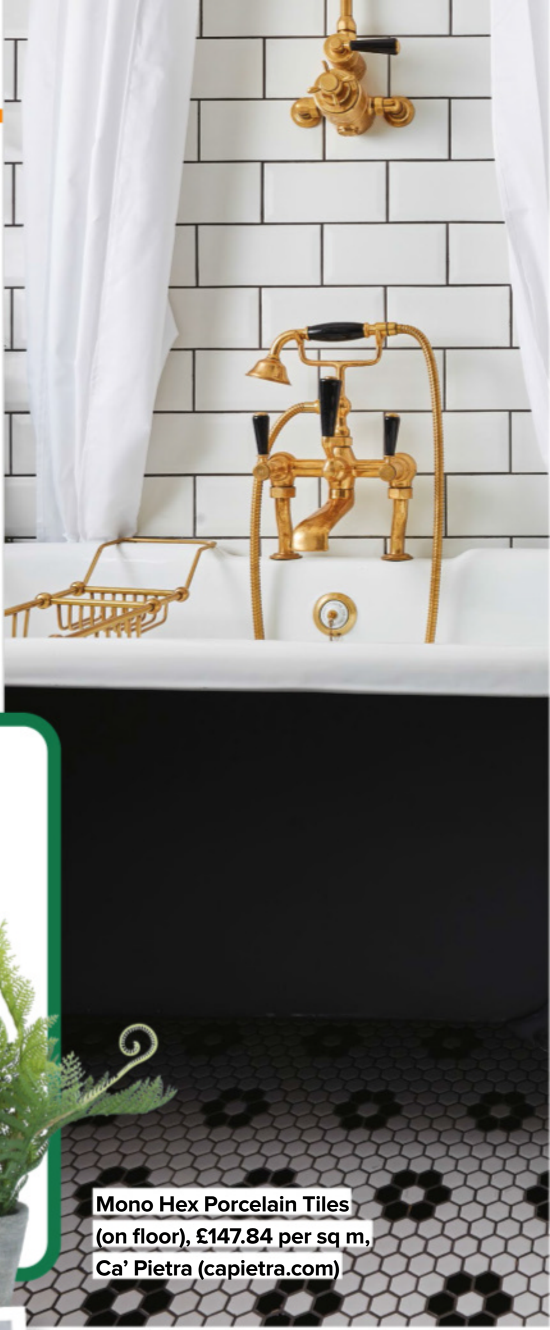
Q I've been feeling very low recently for no reason. I wondered if it was hormonal, so I went to my GP. I was given something but it hasn't helped. My husband is being dismissive, and telling me to pull myself together and to stop complaining. I find that so hurtful; I want him to just be kind to me. What should I do?
Name and address withheld

A I understand that must feel very dismissive and as though he doesn't care. My feeling is he doesn't know what he can do to make things better for you and – as he doesn't like you feeling bad – he tells you to make it better (which, in turn, will make him feel better). As I'm sure you know, that's not a useful cycle. I think there are two issues here. One is your mood. I'd invite you to go back to your GP and explain how you're feeling and explore alternative support, either as medication and/or some type of talking therapy. The other is to chat to your husband. Acknowledge you know it's not easy for him, but that you're working on it. Tell him what you need in the meantime and ask for his help to support you through this challenging time.

MAIN PHOTO (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY

Bright ideas for your BATHROOM

Inspiring ways to refresh your space



Mono Hex Porcelain Tiles (on floor), £147.84 per sq m, Ca' Pietra (capietra.com)

1 ADD GREENERY

Pop to your local garden centre to pick up some moisture-loving houseplants that don't mind low-light conditions. Try air plants, ferns and philodendrons to get started. Don't fancy the upkeep? Look to faux greenery to recreate the botanical look in your bathroom.

✱ Potted faux fern, £19.99, Gisela Graham

2 BATHE IN STYLE

Nothing's better than a long, hot soak in the tub. Set up a space to relax whenever the mood strikes, with a bath rack piled with salts, oils and scrubs. Don't forget a candle, with an aromatherapy-oil base to set the scent.

✱ Bath rack, £66, Himalayan salt glass wax warmer set, £23.99 for two, storage jar, £13.99, all wayfair.co.uk

CALM
apothecary
CONTAINS ESSENTIAL OILS
Lavender / Sweet Orange / Clary Sage / Cedar Wood
SCENTED CANDLE

Calm three-wick candle, £17, M&S

Cotton bath sheets, £34.99 for two, H&M Home

3 UPDATE TOWELS

If you don't want to make any permanent changes your floors, walls or bathroom fittings, look to your textiles to breathe new life into the space. Look for styles with a splash of colour or different textures to add interest, or mix and match your old towels with a complementary set.

✱ Egyptian Cotton Towels in Terracotta and Unbleached, from £1.20 each, resin lotion dispenser, £7, ash wood stool, £119, black bath rack (in the background), £10, all Dunelm

WORDS: ESME CLEMO. PRICES CORRECT AT TIME OF WRITING

4 STAY ORGANISED

Keep your bathroom in order with a set of stylish jars and baskets. Keep cotton buds and pads in sealed glass containers, toothbrushes and toothpaste in a tumbler, and decant soap refills into a pretty pump that matches the rest of your decor for a cohesive look.

✱ Storage set, £8, mosaic soap dispenser, £4, tumbler, £2.50, mirror, £5, all B&M

Soap dispenser, £9.99, Homesense

5 INTRODUCE COLOUR

For a bold new look, turn to the walls. Painting or papering your bathroom's backdrop will make the biggest difference without breaking the bank. Choose a bright-patterned paper with a neutral base, or try a darker shade of paint in blue, green or burgundy.

✱ Enhet/Tvällen bathroom furniture, £254 for 11-piece set, all Ikea; for similar wallpaper, try Spring Fling, £43 per roll, lusthome.com

Lifestyle paint in Lady Bug, £52 for 2.5ltr, Earthborn; Valspar V&Co flat matt emulsion in Blue shade 4 and Green shade 4, £44 for 2.5ltr, B&Q

6 MAXIMISE SPACE

Soaps, cleansers and toothbrushes can often accumulate in a mess around the basin, so keep clutter from surfaces by installing a shelf above. Choose a finish that matches the rest of your bathroom hardware, and use this same principle – utilising wall space – to keep the rest of your bathroom clear.

✱ Similar Novello wall shelf, £75, gardentrading.co.uk

Bronx shelving and towel store unit, £48, Next

SWEET and easy!

Simple pudding ideas to whip up with maximum wow factor

Coconut cream tart

Get a taste of the tropics in no time, and decorate with your favourite exotic fruits.

PER SERVING
232 cals, 13g fat, 10g sat fat, 26g carbs

SERVES 6 TAKES 15 mins, plus chilling

- 2 x 160ml cans coconut cream, chilled overnight
- 4tbsp icing sugar
- 150g dairy-free coconut yogurt
- 2tbsp passion-fruit curd
- 1 sweet pastry case
- Sliced fruit, to decorate (we used 1 golden and 1 regular kiwi)
- Toasted coconut flakes

1 Drain any liquid from the coconut cream and discard. Put the coconut in a bowl with the icing sugar and, using an electric mixer, beat until thickened like whipped double cream. Fold in the yogurt and half the passion-fruit curd.

2 Spoon into the pastry case and spread the filling to the edges. Spoon the remaining curd on top and lightly swirl using the end of a teaspoon. Chill in the fridge for 2 hrs or overnight.

3 Decorate the tart with the sliced fruit and sprinkle the coconut flakes all over just before serving.

COOK'S TIP
For vegans, use vegan shortcrust pastry to make your pastry case, and swap the passion-fruit curd for the flesh of 2 fresh passion fruit mixed with 1tsp sugar.

Frozen berry, oaty crumble

A warming pud that's packed with juicy fruits and has a lovely nutty topping.

SERVES 6 PREP 25 mins
COOK 30 mins

- 900g mixed frozen berries, defrosted
- 6tbsp clear honey
- 4tbsp cornflour
- 150g plain flour
- 150g butter, cold and cut into cubes
- 80g caster sugar
- 40g chopped almonds
- 80g rolled oats
- 500ml pot fresh custard, to serve

YOU WILL NEED

- Approx 25cm oval ovenproof dish

1 Heat the oven to 180C Fan/Gas 6. In a pan, warm about 100g of the berries with the honey. Mix until the berries turn mushy, then stir in the cornflour.

2 Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the remaining berries. Transfer this to the ovenproof dish.

3 Rub the flour and butter together until it starts to form clumps. Mix in the sugar, almonds and oats. Scatter this over the fruit in the dish, and bake for 30 mins. Serve warm with custard.

COOK'S TIP
Making in advance? Add topping just before baking, so it doesn't go soggy.

PER SERVING
700 cals, 28g fat, 15g sat fat, 99g carbs

Viennese ice cream cake

Inspired by the Austrian dessert Malakofftorte, this frozen pud is an almost-effortless showstopper.

MAKES 10-12 PREP 25 mins, plus freezing

- ✱ 2 medium eggs, separated
- ✱ 150ml double cream
- ✱ 250g mascarpone
- ✱ 10g caster sugar
- ✱ 150g dark chocolate florentines, roughly broken into small pieces
- ✱ 2tbsp milk
- ✱ 2tbsp dark rum
- ✱ 120g sponge fingers

FOR THE DECORATION

- ✱ 50g dark chocolate
- ✱ 20g butter

YOU WILL NEED

- ✱ 21x11cm loaf tin, lined with 2 layers of baking paper, plus extra to wrap the dessert before freezing

1 Put the egg whites in a bowl and, using an electric mixer, whisk to firm peaks. In a separate bowl, whisk the cream and mascarpone to soft peaks.

2 In a third bowl, whisk the egg yolks with the sugar, until creamy and thickened. Gently fold into the cream mixture. Then fold in the egg white, half at a time, until evenly combined.

3 Stir in most of the florentines, reserving some for decoration. Spoon a third of the mixture into the tin.

4 Mix together the milk and rum. Dip each sponge finger into the liquid, then lay them on top of the filling to form an even layer.

5 Spoon over another third of the cream, then add another layer of sponge fingers. Cover with the remaining cream and smooth the top. Wrap in baking paper and freeze for at least 2 hrs or overnight.

6 When ready to serve, melt the chocolate and butter in a heatproof bowl set over a pan of simmering water (don't let the bowl touch the water), stirring until smooth and glossy. Allow to cool for a few minutes.

7 Turn out the ice cream cake onto a serving plate and peel away the paper. Drizzle over the chocolate sauce and sprinkle with the reserved florentine pieces. Slice and serve.

PER SERVING
(for 10)
300 cals, 24g fat, 15g sat fat, 15g carbs

COOK'S TIP

This can be made a few days ahead, then decorated before serving. Look out for miniature florentines in your supermarket, as they make an attractive decoration.

COMPILED BY: ROSE FOOKS. RECIPES AND PHOTOS: FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM

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Dedicated TO YOU

Samantha enjoyed the radio show – but one request left her speechless

It was late on Friday afternoon and the office staff were starting to wind down.

Samantha was checking her emails while Milly gathered up mugs from colleagues' desks and sang along with the radio.

'Who had a hit with this?' Milly asked. 'I don't even know how I know the words.'

Samantha smiled. 'One of those boy bands who were a flash in the pan when we were at primary school – not exactly Take That though.'

Steve, their boss, allowed the team to have the radio on as the weekend approached, and always provided a sweet treat for Friday afternoon coffee. Today it had been chocolate brownies, along with Donna Rix reading out dedications on her popular request show on Lucky FM.

'Now we have a special request from Olivia Rogers,' Donna's voice chirped.

'Oh wow! If that's the same Olivia Rogers, she's one of my best friends!' Samantha cried. 'Shh! Let's hear what song she's going to pick.'

'What's this?' Steve asked, stepping into the wider office from his glass sanctum.

'Sam's friend has a request on the Donna Rix show,' Milly whispered.

'Olivia would like us to play a song for her dear friend, who's been her pal ever since their first day at school, over 30 years ago,' Donna continued.

It crossed Samantha's mind that one of the old gang must be having a birthday, getting married or having a baby. She'd fallen out of touch with most of them, although Olivia had called a few days ago and hadn't mentioned anything.

But then… 'Samantha Blake, this is for you, to say congratulations on the exciting new job you start next month. Olivia says you deserve it. Well done from all your buddies who attended Price Street Primary. We hope you enjoy the track Olivia has picked for you: *Every Little Thing She Does is Magic* by The Police.'

> *'When were you going to tell us?'*

Samantha froze. No one uttered a word. She hadn't told anyone in the office that she had been offered and accepted a new job.

* * * *

'So when were you going to tell us?' Milly said at last, sounding hurt.

Oh how Samantha wished she hadn't had that long chat on the phone with Olivia. She hadn't said that her news on the job front was confidential because Olivia didn't know any of the crowd from her office, so it didn't seem necessary. What she had mentioned was the fact that they listened to Donna Rix on Fridays. It didn't enter her head that Olivia would rush off to send in a dedication.

Now everyone in their close-knit team had found out, and not in the way Samantha had wanted.

'I was planning to tell you all myself, properly,' she said sheepishly, looking around at the wounded faces.

'So why didn't you?' Milly demanded.

'Perhaps I should answer that,' Steve piped up.

Everyone, Samantha included, turned to look at their boss.

'I asked Samantha not to say anything until I had put a few more things in place,' Steve continued. 'The fact is, for some time I've been seeing increasing opportunities for our little company to grow. That means better job security for everyone, and hopefully a pay rise. However, I do need to get back out there on the road, making deals – like I did when I first started the business. That means I need someone here at base, doing the work I do now.'

Milly glanced at Samantha, then turned back to Steve.

'You mean Sam?'

'I approached Samantha, told her what I had in mind, and asked if she would be willing to step up. You all know how good she is, and how hard-working, as well as getting along well with everyone. I was delighted when she said she would take the job.'

Milly gave a little shriek of joy, sprang to Samantha's side and hugged her.

'It was never my intention to keep any of you in the dark – I just wanted to do things properly,' Steve added. 'I was going to take everyone to lunch next week, to make the announcement officially, but…'

'Lunch sounds great!' Milly said. 'Just to formalise things.'

Happy that everything was out in the open, Samantha mused that, when she ran the office, she would continue Steve's generosity with the tasty Friday treats – and probably stick with Lucky FM. After all, in the end, it had been kind of lucky for her.

THE END

Eirin Thompson, 2023

*** ED Thompson's novel *Closing In* (£13.99, Hachette) is out now.**

© FUTURE PUBLISHING LIMITED, 2023. PHOTO (POSED BY MODEL): GETTY

Jewels of THE LOIRE

France's Loire Valley is filled with stunning chateaux, perfect to visit on a spring break

Grand gardens at the Château de Villandry

Paris may be the country's present-day capital, but for centuries, the Loire Valley was the regal seat of the powerful French kings. Along undulating stretches of the snaking Loire River, royalty and their courts built hundreds of opulent chateaux. Today, the Loire is just a couple of hours from Paris by train, and holds many architectural treasures worth exploring, as well as elaborate gardens, charming vineyards and beautiful villages.

Royal history

Reachable by train direct from Paris, the town of Blois is one of the getaways to the Loire Valley. It is also home to one of its most magnificent builds, Château Royal de Blois (blois.fr), with over 600 years of history. Louis XII was born here in 1462 and transformed the chateau with a large new Gothic wing; later, François I extended it further and added an ambitious spiral staircase on the facade. A self-guided tour through the museum interiors gives insight into centuries of royal life. But the daily evening sound and light show, where videos are projected onto the buildings in an elaborate spectacle, is not to be missed, either.

Heritage site

With so many of Loire's chateaux open to the public – several dozen, in fact – many begin to look similar. But there's nothing else like Chambord (chambord.org), built by François I over 28 years in the 16th century. A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1981, it holds a vast white stone interior with a double-helix staircase spiralling up to the heavens, plus carved emblems and 282 fireplaces. Wandering through its rooms – and even up to its rooftop, which gives you views over the rambling surrounding parkland – you can understand why the thick walls were chosen to hide many of the Louvre's precious treasures during the Second World War. After you've explored, stop off for a bite in one of the nearby cafes, or visit the shop to purchase wine made on the estate grounds (while not related, the famous raspberry liqueur Chambord is also made nearby!).

Dramatic views

Perched dramatically on a hilltop, the Royal Fortress of Chinon is one of the Loire's older chateaux and has largely been reduced to ruins, with just a few austere rooms left for visitor wanders. Come for the beautiful views – stretching out over Loire River tributary the Vienne, Chinon village below and green farmland – but also to learn about its rich history. For example, Joan of Arc famously stopped off here in 1429 to meet with Charles VII.

Elaborate gardens

Many of the chateaux in the Loire have beautiful gardens, but the statistics at Villandry (chateauvillandry.fr) – set just outside regional capital Tours – are particularly staggering. Revived by Spanish doctor Joachim Carvallo in the 19th century, the grounds contain 1,015 lime trees and enough box hedging to amount to 52km run, while a total of

Blois, and its imposing Royal Chateau

Contemporary art at the Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire

WORDS: ALICIA MILLER. PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK

Sumptuous Chambord

115,000 flowers and vegetables are planted out every year. Start your visit with a tour of the chateau itself, where you'll get snippets of views out over the ornamental and vegetable gardens, the latter planted in edibles of alternating colours to form a dazzling geometric pattern.

Contemporary art

Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire (domaine-chaumont.fr) does things a bit differently to many other Loire chateaux. Rather than falling back on historically inspired interiors, it has filled its grand spaces with cutting-edge installations from artists around the world. Its chapel contains a whimsical woodland arrangement, its loft a digital art piece and its stables an arrangement of geode rocks. Beyond the chateau itself, the wider grounds also host the International Garden Festival each year, with global designers working to a pre-announced theme; this year's 'Resilient Garden' runs from 23 April to 5 November.

Where to stay

In the Loire, you can even sleep in a chateau! At the aforementioned Domaine de Chaumont-sur-Loire, a new hotel, Le Bois de Chambres, is very contemporary, and features more fascinating art pieces in its public spaces. Double rooms from £127, including breakfast; leboisdeschambres.fr. And for the full regal experience within an old castle itself, try Château Hôtel de la Bourdaisière. Double rooms from around £113; labourdaisiere.com

The Château Hôtel de la Bourdaisière

© ADT Touraine

GET ME THERE

Eurostar (eurostar.com) has frequent trains from London St Pancras International to Paris Gare du Nord. Onward trains from Paris Gare d'Austerlitz to Blois-Chambord take around two hours; try SNCF (sncf.com/en) for details.

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- ✱ **Sideboard**
- ✱ **Screwdriver**
- ✱ **Old sheet or cardboard**
- ✱ **Fine-grade sandpaper**
- ✱ **Masking tape**
- ✱ **Paint in four different shades**
- ✱ **Paintbrush or mini roller**
- ✱ **Varnish**

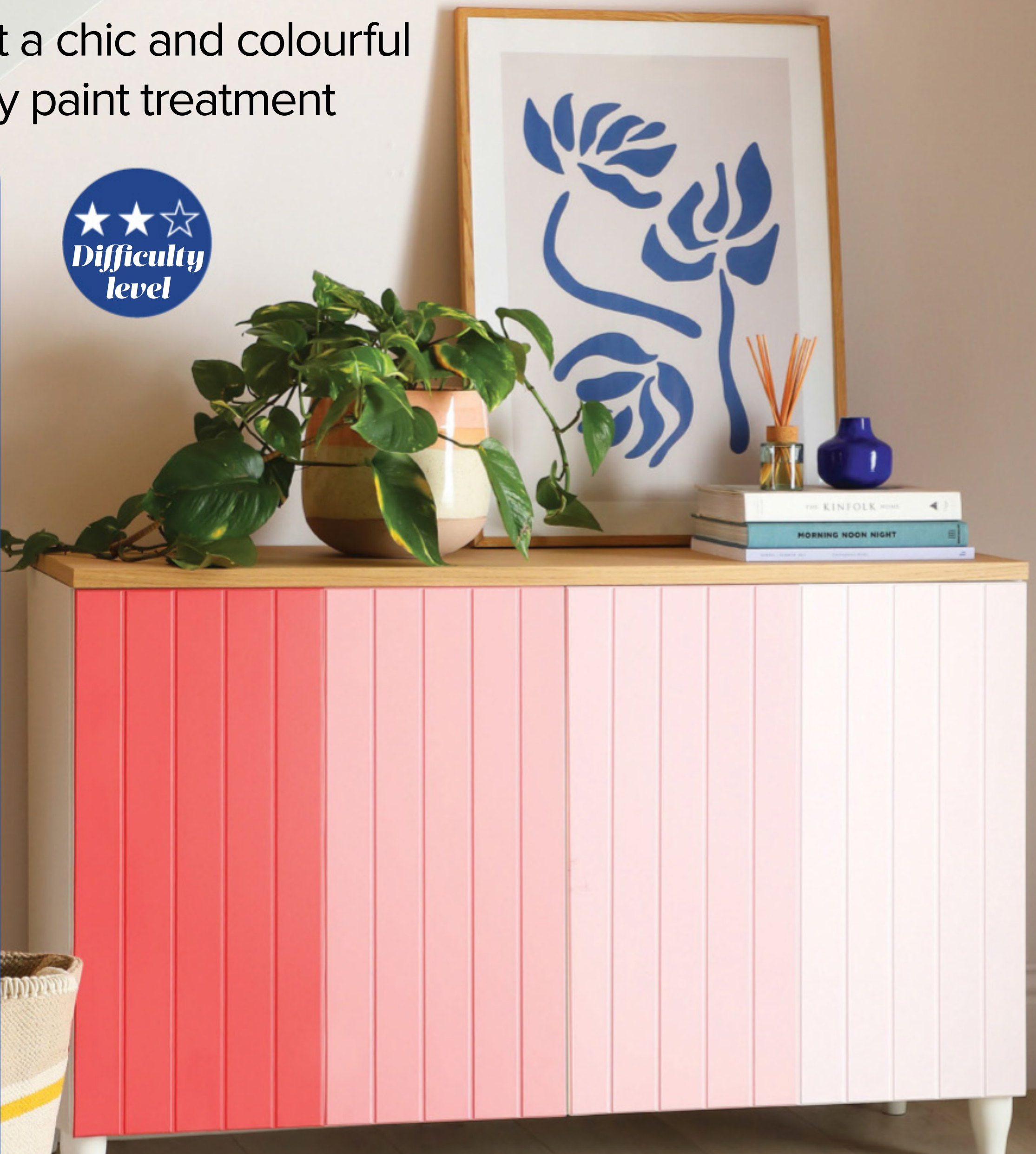
1 Remove the sideboard doors, using a screwdriver, and lay them out on the floor on an old sheet or some cardboard to protect the surface beneath.

2 Plan out four equal sections on the doors and assign a paint shade to each. To achieve an ombré effect, use the darkest colour on one end of the doors and work towards the lightest colour on the other end.

3 Use fine-grade sandpaper to create a key (a slight roughness) on the surface and wipe down with a cloth to remove any dust particles.

4 Mask the first section out with tape and paint with the your chosen colour, using a paintbrush or a small roller. Leave to dry completely before removing the masking tape and repeating for the remaining sections.

5 Once dry apply several coats of varnish to the doors to protect them. Allow to dry again, then reattach the doors to the sideboard.



PROJECT AND PHOTOS: FURNITURE AND CHOICE

Beautiful BIENNIALS

When spring bulbs start to fade, fill the flowering gap with these plants

Forget-me-nots spread through wallflowers and tulips

Wallflowers

Evening primrose

Timely treasures

Having a two-year life cycle, these plants develop roots and leaves in the first year, and flower and set seed in the second. They're incredibly useful for late spring and early summer colour, as they flower from March onwards – when spring bulbs are starting to bow out and before hardy annuals get started. As well as being easy to grow from seed, many will self-seed freely, so you'll get new plants next year for zero effort.

Super cover-ups

Pretty spreading biennials, like forget-me-nots (Myosotis), are handy, crowding out weeds with a froth of baby-blue flowers. Choose a non-invasive variety, like 'Blue Ball', and team with honey-scented wallflowers (*Erysimum cheiri*) in colour-saturated hues. A block of beloved classics, like 'Scarlet Bedder' and 'Cloth of Gold' (both H. 45cm), or a newbie, like compact 'Colour Vibe Red' (H. 30cm), will wake up beds and patio planters from April to the early summer months.

Heavenly aroma

For candy-scented summer days, look to biennials like sweet william and sweet rocket.

Suited to a cottage or wildlife-friendly garden, sweet rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*. H. 90cm) has loose clusters of white or purple flowers that make informal ribbons of colour. Sweet william (*Dianthus barbatus*. H. 45cm) has patterned, carnation-like flowers in vivid shades, from pink and red to purple-black, and happily fills the middle of a border or a planter. Both enjoy full sun and will flower for longer when they are deadheaded.

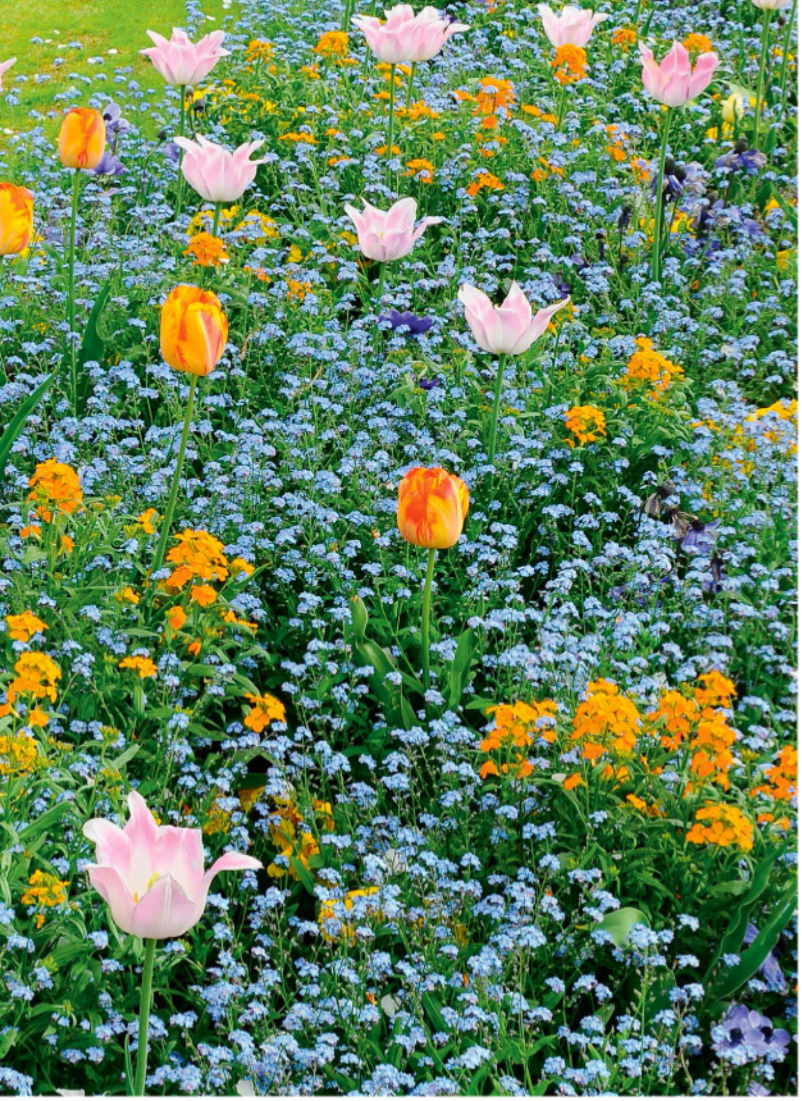
Evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*. H. 1m) has lemon, bowl-like blooms that open in the evening, luring night-flying pollinators like moths.

FLOWER TOWERS

Canterbury bells and foxgloves throw up architectural spires loaded with bee-friendly blooms from May onwards. The large single or double cups of Canterbury bells (*Campanula medium*) come in pink, blue, white and violet. The wild, freckled purple species is lovely, but you could switch things up with showier types, like 'Sutton's Apricot' in soft pink-peach, pure-white 'Alba' or 'The Shirley', an extra-tall (1.5m) mix of plum, cream, pink and salmon shades. Encourage repeat-flowering by cutting down old spikes.

Foxglove 'Sutton's Apricot'

WORDS: CHRIS MORLEY. PHOTOS: ALAMY



CUT FLOWERS

If you enjoy cut flowers, biennials are your friends. Try the following:

- **Icelandic poppy (*Papaver nudicaule*) – papery flowers that last up to a week when stems are snipped and seared in boiling water.**
- **Honesty (Lunaria) – white or purple flowers for cutting May to July, followed by discs of silvery seed pods for dried arrangements.**
- ***Smyrnium perfoliatum* – delicate stems with rounded, lime leaves and acid-yellow flower heads make a stylish filler.**

Icelandic poppy

Honesty

Smyrnium perfoliatum

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Saved by the House MOUSE

Everyone thought Dave was a perfect match for Anna – so why had he cheated on her?

That's it. It's over!' said Anna after her sister Bethany's phone call. 'Dave's a rotten, two-timing pig. He's history.'

She felt hollow with misery to think that the lovely guy she had been dating for just over a month had turned out to be a cheating rat. Going off to a nightclub with some gorgeous blonde when he'd said he was spending the evening with his mother. And this was his 'sick mother' that he had to visit so often! To think how she'd sympathised with him.

She sat in front of her computer meaning to send him a few cold and final sentences in an email, but her manager had just forwarded a folder full of documents that he needed sorting by the end of the day. So, she had to postpone giving Dave the boot.

'Why not phone him?' asked her sister when she called again that afternoon. 'Tell him I saw him in the club and you want an explanation.'

'No,' said Anna. 'Dave is great at sweet-talking me. I'm not giving him the chance to make me weaken and forgive him.'

'But Dave's such a honey. Don't be too quick off the mark. Get his side of the story. Maybe it was a business meeting.'

'On a Saturday night, in a nightclub? Dave sells motor parts. No way was she a customer. She was the blonde straw that broke this pathetic camel's back.'

'At least write him a proper letter,' said Bethany. 'On paper, with a stamp. A lot more classy than an email or text in my opinion.'

'Well, I'm not sure he's worth the effort, but I suppose you're right.'

* * * *

When she got home, Anna's flatmate Zoe was doing her usual house-beautiful thing, which Anna had learnt to ignore. Zoe was only happy if she was keeping the place spotless and, as Anna hated housework of any sort, they were perfectly suited to share the apartment.

Never trust a man with a roving eye

Anna rummaged around in a drawer and found some paper and an envelope. Then she sat down to compose the letter.

Dear Dave, You lied to me about last Saturday night. My sister spotted you in a nightclub with a blonde woman. You've probably been cheating on me every time you claimed to be visiting your mother.

She sniffed and wiped her eyes. This was going to be hard. She had thought Dave was 'the one'. Then she felt anger rise. She started writing again.

For all I know you haven't even got a mother, you rat, and if you have, she probably has a pointy nose and whiskers.

OK, that bit wasn't too classy, but she couldn't help herself. She finished…

Don't bother to phone me and try to persuade me to change my mind. I really thought we had something, Dave, but apparently you didn't. I hope that blonde in the club was worth it. No longer yours, Anna.

Perfect, she thought, addressing and stamping the envelope.

* * * *

Anna left the letter on the kitchen table to post in the morning.

'It's your turn to put away the washing-up,' reminded Zoe. 'And wipe down the sink, then rinse the cloth.'

'Careful, you're doing your house-mouse thing again,' Anna grinned, rolling her eyes. She wondered sometimes if Zoe should get help for her obsessive tidiness. She even ironed the dish towels.

But she smiled patiently, and did exactly as she was told.

'This letter is for Dave. I'm dumping him,' she said, while she tidied. 'I still love him to bits, but I know I'm doing the right thing. My mum warned me never to trust a man with a roving eye or I'd regret it for the rest of my life.'

'A letter? Very old style,' Zoe smiled. 'But I wouldn't have said Dave had an eye for anyone but you, actually. I really think you two make a lovely couple.'

'Made, past tense,' said Anna briefly.

* * * *

Although Anna had just saved herself years of misery, she couldn't stop crying when she went to bed.

The next morning Zoe had already left for work, and the letter had gone from the table. Good old efficient Zoe, saving her the pain of posting it.

She got through the day in a fog of misery, and when her sister phoned to suggest coffee after work, she agreed.

'So, what's your news?' Bethany said as soon as she sat down in the cafe. 'Did you ask Dave about that girl?'

'Dave's history,' she said flatly. 'I sent him a… erm… classy letter. And thanks, Sis. If you hadn't seen him with that blonde, I would never have known what a cheat he really is.'

She dragged herself home in despair

'True. She was all over him, and so were her two friends. All three blonde and beautiful and all belting out karaoke like crazy. Dave looked quite embarrassed, you know.'

'*Three* blondes!' Anna was outraged. 'And Dave usually hates karaoke. I'm well shot of him.'

* * * *

The next morning at work, it started to hit her. Dave would have opened his letter by now, so there would be no more cheerful morning calls, brightening her day with his latest joke. And no more plans to make for the weekend together.

But just as she reached her desk, the phone rang.

'Hi, sweetie pie!' Dave's warm, mellow voice forced her to sit down in a hurry. He obviously hadn't received her letter yet.

OK, here it comes, she thought. Some big lie about his poor mother again. 'How was your weekend without me?' he went on. 'Mine was horrible without you.'

'Oh, yes? With your mum, were you?' She tried to sound as cold as possible.

'Yeah… and my two aunties. They flew in from America on Friday. And wow! Are they a wild pair! They insisted on going to a club with me and Mum. Said they wanted to experience a real British night out. It was hard work keeping up with the three of them. I was totally knackered on Sunday and I'm still suffering.'

Anna couldn't stop herself. 'So then who was the gorgeous blonde girl that Bethany saw you with? The one who was all over you?'

'Blonde… girl? That must have been my mum,' he laughed. 'I suppose she is pretty gorgeous. She'd be thrilled to hear that. Perhaps the wig made her look younger.'

'Your mum wears a wig?'

'Just until her hair grows back. She's been having cancer treatment and all her hair fell out. She said she's always wanted to be blonde, so she bought this long, blonde wig. My aunties were dead envious, so they each both bought themselves one. It was a bit of a riot, actually. Wish you'd been there, but it was all a bit last minute.'

'I wish I had been too,' said Anna in a small voice, thinking… So much for Bethany's new contact lenses.

Then she was silent, all her misery evaporating on a heatwave of joy. How could she have doubted her gorgeous man for a minute? And his mother really had been unwell. So, of course, he'd been to visit her often.

'Mum wants to meet you, now she's feeling so much better,' Dave continued. 'I've told her all about you. Maybe we could go and see her together this weekend.'

'I'd love to,' Anna said. But she couldn't wait until then to see him. 'How about coming over tonight and I'll make us some pasta?'

'Great!'

She caught herself grinning foolishly all through the day.

After work, as she shopped for mushrooms, cream and ham to make a pasta alfredo, she hummed happily. Everything was all right, she and Dave were on again. And luckily, he never knew he'd been dumped.

Then a cold hand clutched at her heart… The letter!

She'd been so over the moon that Dave hadn't cheated on her that she'd completely forgotten about it. Dave would be home by now, reading his post.

And once he'd read it, he definitely wouldn't come over this evening. He probably wouldn't even phone her.

Bethany and Zoe had been right. She should have heard his side of the story first.

What had she written? *You rat… your mother probably has a pointy nose and whiskers…*

He'd never forgive her. She dragged herself home in despair.

* * * *

'Hi,' said Zoe. 'Mushrooms and cream? What's the occasion, did you make up with Dave?'

'I did and now I think I haven't. It's a long story.'

'Oh.' Zoe looked disappointed. 'I really hoped you'd phone him. Hey, you shouldn't leave your keys on the table, they're supposed to be in the drawer.'

Anna scowled. House-mouse Zoe was on patrol again. She wrenched open the drawer to shove her keys inside. On top of the bills, waiting for attention, lay a crisp white envelope.

'You didn't post my letter?' she whispered, her heart doing somersaults of joy.

'No, of course not. I just tidied it away last night.'

'Oh Zoe, I just love you!' grinned Anna, throwing her arms around her flatmate. Then a thought struck her. 'Did you hide it away on purpose?'

'Of course not. It just looked so untidy sitting there,' said Zoe, with a grin. 'There's Dave's knock now. I'm going out for a meal, did I mention that? You two have fun!'

THE END

Ginny Swart, 2023

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★☆☆ Difficulty level

TESTED BY US so they work for you

Sherbet stripes

Our candy-coloured blanket is finished with tassels

Instructions overleaf

MEASUREMENTS

Approximately 83x87cm/32¾x34¼in.

MATERIALS

1 x 100g (295m) ball of Stylecraft Special DK (100% acrylic) in each of Purple (Magenta 1084), Pink (Pomegranate 1083), Peach (Apricot 1026), Yellow (Citron 1263), Pale Green (Pistachio 1822), Bright Green (Grass Green 1821), Pale Blue (Duck Egg 1820), Teal (Sage 1725) and Blue (Denim 1302)*. Size 4mm crochet hook; thick card for tassel making. Yarn is available from theknittingnetwork.co.uk

TENSION

4 pattern repeats and 9 rows, to measure 10x10cm, over pattern, using 4mm hook.

ABBREVIATIONS

Ch, chain; **chsp(s)**, chain space(s); **blo**, back loop only; **dc**, double crochet; **htr**, half treble crochet; **slst**, slip stitch; **st(s)**, stitch(es); **yrh**, yarn round hook; **4trcl**, 4 treble crochet cluster stitch thus: [yrh, insert hook into st or space as indicated, yrh and pull loop through, yrh, pull through first 2 loops only] 4 times (5 loops on hook), yrh and pull through all 5 loops.

NOTE

You can use yarn stash oddments to make your blanket, noting that if you use a different weight of yarn, your blanket will be a different size. Use the hook size that is recommended for your yarn. Yarn amounts are based on average requirements and are therefore approximate. Instructions in brackets are worked as stated after 2nd bracket.

DESIGN RIGHTS AND PHOTOS: FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM. *YARN SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY

BLANKET STRIPE SEQUENCE

Stripes are worked in the following colour sequence throughout.

1 row each of:

- Purple
- Pink
- Peach
- Yellow
- Pale Green
- Bright Green
- Pale Blue
- Teal

MAIN BLANKET

With Purple, ch152.

1st row (right side): 1dc in 2nd ch from hook, [3ch, 4trcl over next 4 ch, 1ch, 1dc in next ch] to end, changing to Pink on last yrh of last dc, turn – 30 pattern repeats and 1dc.

2nd row: 3ch, [1dc in top of next 4trcl, 3ch, 4trcl in 3chsp, 1ch] to last st, 1dc in last st, changing to Peach on last yrh of last dc, turn.

3rd row: 3ch, [1dc in top of next 4trcl, 3ch, 4trcl in 3chsp, 1ch] to last dc, skip last dc, 1dc in top of beginning 3ch from beginning of previous row changing to next colour on last yrh of last dc, turn. 3rd row forms pattern.

Repeat 3rd row, changing colour as before on last yrh of last dc of each row, following the colour sequence given, until you have finished 11 colour repeats in total. Blanket should measure approximately 75x79cm. Fasten off on last row and weave in all ends before beginning the border.

BORDER

Take care to evenly space your htr sts in 1st round, to prevent blanket from warping. As a guide, this is approximately 4 htr for each pattern repeat across top and bottom, and approximately 3 htr for every 2 rows along sides. Note that specific stitch counts are not given, as your stitch count may vary depending on your tension.

1st round (right side): With Blue, and with right side facing, join yarn in top right corner space, 2ch (counts as a 1htr), work (1htr, 2ch, 1htr) in same space, work htr evenly around the blanket edge, working (2htr, 2ch, 2htr) in each corner, slst in top of beginning 2ch, slst in next htr, slst into corner 2chsp.

2nd round: 1ch (does not count as a st), work (1dc, 2ch, 1dc) in each corner and 1dcblo in each st around the blanket edge, slst in first dc and fasten off – 8 sts increased.

When working 3rd to 7th rounds, fasten off at end of each round then start the next colour in a different corner. This gives a neater finish. If at any point your blanket edge is pulling in, work (2dc, 2ch, 2dc) in each corner on next round.

3rd to 7th rounds: Use colours in the following order: Pale Green, Yellow, Peach, Pink, Purple. Join yarn to any corner 2chsp with a slst, 1ch (does not count as a st), (1dc, 2ch, 1dc) in corner space, continue working 1dc in each st all around blanket edge and (1dc, 2ch, 1dc) in corner spaces, slst in first dc, fasten off – 8 sts increased.

8th round: Join Blue in any corner 2chsp with a slst, 2ch (counts as first htr), work (1htr, 2ch, 2htr) in corner space, continue working 1htr in each st around blanket edge and (2htr, 2ch, 2htr) in corner spaces, slst in top of beginning 2ch – 16 sts increased.

Fasten off and weave in ends.

TO FINISH

Because you have worked several rounds of double crochet stitches, the blanket may not sit completely flat. This can be rectified by gently pulling it flat and then blocking with water. Using all colours held together and a piece of thick card, make 4 tassels and attach one to each corner.

✱ If you have any knitting and crochet questions, please contact Knitting Editor Lynne at lynne.rowe@futurenet.com

NEXT WEEK *Hat and mittens set*

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"I have more flexibility in my hands and the arthritic pain has GONE"

Erica Metcalf (73), hobby gardener, explains how her arthritic pain has gone.

"I HAD resigned myself to arthritic pain for the rest of my life. I never imagined I could be pain free. But that's exactly what happened to me when I started using the Pain-Away Pen.

I had suffered with arthritis in my hands for over 16 years and had tried all kinds of ointments and medications, but nothing would stop the pain. It was so frustrating, it stopped me from doing so much.

The pain got so bad that I had to give up gardening and it pained me to see my lovely garden turn from my pride and joy to an absolute mess. It was so bad I hated looking out the window and would sometimes draw the curtains not to see it. I was at my wits end with the pain in my hands and I was getting more fed up and depressed.

Then I read about the Pain-Away Pen, it wasn't expensive so I thought I'd order one to try it out. That was the best decision of my life, it has worked a miracle!

It's like having your own massage therapist on hand all the time. I use the pen just a few times a day for a minute or so, that's all. It has helped me get movement back in my hands and now I can do so much more but most of all its stopped the pain dead.

After using it for just two weeks I was back to my favourite hobby – gardening.

Pain-Away Pen has put the joy back in my life, my garden is already looking so much better. I can't tell you how good it feels to live without pain and being able to carry on with a normal life."

■ **Pain Away Pens are available from Health Solutions – for a limited period only there is a discount price of £29.95 + p&p. Call FREEPHONE 0808 156 4981 and quote offer code PAE140.**

"I no longer suffer with sciatica"

"I have now enjoyed a week of uninterrupted sleep for the first time in years!

Chronic sciatica pain had given me sleepless nights and made doing everyday things an ordeal, some days all I wanted to do was cry. I have suffered with it ever since a ski accident four years ago.

Although I'd tried various pain relief methods, nothing seemed to work for me. Exercises and physical therapy didn't sort the problem, and I was forced to take lots of pain killers which I don't like to do, but sometimes I needed them just to get me through the day.

But then my sister told me about PAIN-AWAY which she had been using for her carpal tunnel pain. I thought it was worth a try.

Now I find that using PAIN-AWAY about three times a week eases all my pain, I feel like my old self again and have got my life back.

I really can't believe how such a neat gadget can make such a difference. The best thing about PAIN-AWAY is that it works on so many types of pain. It looks just like a normal pen and it's also easy to carry around in your handbag."

Janice H, London

"My back pain has been cured thanks to this secret device"

"I'm so grateful that the **Pain-Away Pen** has freed me from years of back ache.

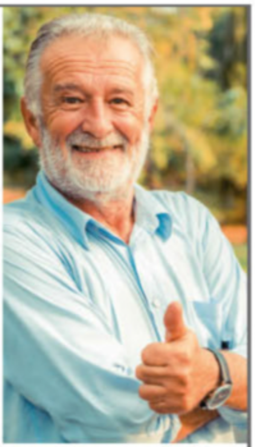
I'd been suffering back pain from a slipped disc for almost 10 years. My doctor said 'there's nothing I can do, it is something that I'll have to live with.'

Some days the pain was awful and I would find it difficult doing even the simplest of things and I hated having to rely on my neighbour to come over anytime I needed something lifting around the house. Then a few weeks ago my son came over with a present, a **Pain-Away Pen**.

He told me that a colleague at his work had used one to cure his back ache. I was a bit reluctant, but I tried it.

I'm not sure exactly how it works, but my goodness it does! Last week I went to see my doctor about another matter, I said, 'Look, doctor, no more backache!' And then I bent down to touch my toes twice, to show him that it was true.

Even though it looks like a biro, it's remarkable, my secret device!"



James Rice (68), retired Civil Servant

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SERIAL PART 1

A sentimental JOURNEY

Jessica's future on the holiday island looked bright, but a find on the beach brought back memories of her past

The late afternoon sunshine glinted off the turquoise water, dazzling her eyes, so that Jessica didn't immediately notice the bottle rolling steadily on the lip of the tide.

She bent and picked it out of the shallow water, noting the barnacles and the tendrils of seaweed on the amber, salt-mottled glass.

It was clear that the bottle had been in the sea for some time. It was topped with a cork, of the type used for good-quality spirits, and some kind of wax sealant had been wedged in the neck of the bottle, giving added protection to the contents within – a roll of yellowed paper tied with pink ribbon.

There was a message inside! Jessica's heart leapt with childish excitement.

Such messages had held a fascination for Jessica throughout her childhood. She'd been captivated by stories of bottles washed up on beaches, sometimes as many as 100 years after their launching.

She'd filled her adolescent imaginings with tales of sailors in treacherous seas tossing last desperate declarations of love to those left back on land, and stories of navigators and nautical chart-makers sending out bottles to discover more about the tides in unexplored oceans.

Such stories had encouraged Jessica and her best friend Lizzy to launch their own bottles from Brighton Pier one hot afternoon in August, hoping to find boyfriends. Their 12-year-old bodies flooding with hormones, they'd leant over the railings and flung the bottles, with much ceremony and melodrama, into the English Channel.

Jessica had often thought about those bottles and, for a brief, ridiculous moment, she imagined this bottle might be hers. How ironic would that be? To find one's own message on a Majorcan beach, 11 years after its release.

Jessica knew her bottle was more likely lodged somewhere in the mud, a mile off Brighton seafront, or it had been kicked along a beach further along the coast by a sulky teenager and shattered against the rocks, its contents left to the elements.

'What have you found?' Jessica's friend Marta had joined her at the water's edge and was studying the bottle with interest.

Jessica passed it to her and she turned it in her hands. 'There's something inside it!'

Jessica nodded and grinned, recognising a similar childlike enthusiasm in her friend's reaction, and both women struggled for a while, trying to work the cork from the bottle.

'We're wasting our time,' Jessica said eventually. 'It's got some sort of additional seal around the cork. It's going to take quite a bit of prising.'

Marta grabbed Jessica's arm. 'Come over to the restaurant. We'll have something there to help us get this open.'

****

Jessica allowed Marta to lead her across the sand towards the palm-lined promenade. The picturesque harbour of Port de Sóller was filled with smart yachts and white sailing boats, and the sound of cheerful holidaymakers drifted over to them from the shops and cafes.

Marta and her husband Pepe owned a restaurant in the southern corner of the port. The place had been in Pepe's family for many generations and, as well as being intent on upholding family traditions, Pepe prided himself on his cellar. He claimed it offered the best selection of locally produced wines in the area.

'Hello, Jessica. I trust you're fully recovered?' Pepe grinned mischievously and gave the little wooden pavement table where she'd seated herself a quick sweep with his cloth, while Marta disappeared off into the kitchen.

The previous night had seen the town celebrating the beginning of the annual Orange Fair, and Pepe had hosted a wine-tasting alongside small plates of his renowned tapas and pintos. Marta had conjured up some additional dishes with the citrus fruit at their heart. The port's promenade had throbbed with holidaymakers and locals, all enjoying the craft workshops, gastronomic demonstrations and bands of musicians that lined the pavements.

Jessica had sat at her usual pavement table, tucking into plates of caramelised figs with goat's cheese, and pastries oozing with pork, apricots and grated orange zest. Nearby, a band of young men sung lustily and banged on pigskin drums.

Pepe and Marta had bustled among the tables waving wine bottles and carrying plates piled high with tapas. They would stop every now and then to chat to Jessica and insist she sample every one of Pepe's delicious wines free of charge, until finally she'd had to admit defeat.

'A glass of Tempranillo?' Pepe now grinned, flinging his cloth over his shoulder with a flourish. He was referring to that year's batch of his favourite Catalan wine.

The previous evening he had regaled Jessica, and anyone else who would listen, with tales of skin maceration and lengthy ageing processes in American oak casks.

'You could wash the dead in this wine and they'd resurrect themselves,' he'd proclaimed proudly as Jessica took appreciative sips from her glass.

This afternoon, however, she shook her head and grimaced at the very mention of the wine.

* * * *

Marta appeared brandishing a rather dangerous-looking knife and a gas-filled candle lighter. When Pepe looked at the two women questioningly, Jessica took out the amber bottle and set it on the table.

'Is this what I think it is?' Pepe studied the bottle with a glint in his eye.

Marta and Jessica nodded enthusiastically, and Marta set to work removing the cork. After a few blasts from the lighter, and some speculative jabs with the knife, they were able to wriggle the cork free. Then Jessica carefully eased the roll of paper through the neck of the bottle with the aid of a toothpick.

As she loosened the pink ribbon and unrolled the sheet of yellowed paper, something else slipped out onto the table. They found themselves gazing at a photograph of two middle-aged women.

The picture was slightly water-damaged, but it was easy to make out the women's features. The woman on the right had a round, jovial face and a shock of reddish hair. The other had more delicate features with white hair, cut into a short pixie style, and eyes an intense shade of blue.

Jessica began to read the note.

Dear finder, my name is Veronica Stokes (on the left) and this is my dear friend, Lillian Adair. We live in the UK, and have been together for 30 years. Through all those years, we have both loved to travel. We may have to curtail our travels for a while, so we've decided to continue our journeying in this bottle and trust it may take us to some of those places we have yet to explore. We started this journey on St Simons Island off the coast of Georgia, USA, where there are good tides and wind conditions. I launched us from the pier early morning on the first day of March 2011, when the winds were favourable. We'd love to hear where those winds have blown us. I enclose my phone number and ask that you please get in touch. In expectation, Veronica and Lillian.

'I can remember the note I put in mine'

Pepe sucked in his breath. 'All the way from the USA!'

'March 2011. This message is 11 years old!' Marta said, squinting at the piece of paper lying on the table.

Jessica nodded, at the same time realising, with a jolt, that the bottle had been launched at the very same year that she and Lizzy had launched their bottles – from a different pier, with a different incentive, but with the same sense of expectation. She tried for a moment to picture Veronica and Lillian on that day, 11 years ago, as they leant over that blustery pier in Georgia. She wondered how long they had remained standing there on that cold morning in March. How long their gazes had followed the bottle, their eyes straining in weak sunlight or through a light mist of rain. Until, with a final bob of farewell, the bottle had disappeared under the crest of a wave.

Jessica found herself telling Pepe and Marta about the bottles that she and Lizzy had sent on their way.

'I can still remember the note I put in mine,' she giggled. 'It said, *Dear finder, my name is Jessica Long. Please would you write to me? I am 12 years old and like going to the cinema, singing and walking my dog, Jip. I also have a goldfish called Sparkle*. We included our email addresses, but nobody ever wrote back. It's hardly surprising really. It was a pretty boring bio.'

Pepe shook his head vehemently. 'I disagree. A singer and a lover of animals. I think you sounded like an enchanting young lady.'

Pepe's expression became wistful. 'I too had a goldfish as a boy. His name was Juan.' Pepe gazed off across the mountains. 'I was devastated when he died. I insisted on a full Catholic funeral.'

The two women laughed and Jessica slipped the bottle and its contents back into her backpack. 'Seems I have a phone call to make,' she said.

* * * *

When Jessica eventually boarded the little wooden tram that ran from the port back into

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

Sóller town, the sun was hanging low over the mountains and they were changing rapidly to the smoky-blue of evening.

In her backpack, along with the bottle and the message, she carried a bag of fresh figs and apricots from Pepe and Marta's garden.

Back at the little single-storied cottage that she'd been renting since the previous spring, Jessica sat outside on a creaky swinging seat and breathed in the evening scents of pine and wild fennel. Citrus orchards stretched in front of her as far as the eye could see, and beyond them, the mountains, already taking on the lion-orange glow of sunset. Her mind was preoccupied with the message she'd found, but also with her old friend Lizzy.

Marta had quizzed her about Lizzy once Pepe had left them to serve some customers. She'd noted a touch of sadness in Jessica's voice when she spoke about her old friend and had been curious to know more. Jessica had told Marta how she and Lizzy had been best friends throughout high school and then had attended acting school together.

'Lizzy has gone on to be a successful actor. These last six months, she's been making her mark in the TV soap *Hobson's Harbour*,' Jessica told Marta. 'She always did have more going for her than me.'

Marta had raised her eyebrows. 'I think you're underestimating yourself, Jessica. After all, moving to another country and setting up your own online business as a singing teacher shows great aptitude… and courage.'

Jessica shrugged and smiled wistfully. 'You know, I have very few memories of back then that don't include Lizzy. We did everything together.'

'You're lucky to have such a friend.'

'*Was* lucky.'

Marta had looked at Jessica then, with a question in her eyes, and Jessica had told her how she and Lizzy had argued, more than a year ago, and hadn't spoken since.

'Lizzy and I had never really had a serious row before that, and it caused a rift. I kept meaning to ring her, but I wasn't proud of how I'd behaved. And the more time that went by, the harder it became to make that call.'

'But you must contact her,' Marta had insisted, grabbing Jessica's hand across the table. 'Good friends like that are a gift. I lost a friend that way myself, a long time ago, because I was too proud. I've always regretted it.'

Jessica considered Marta's words now as she sat under the grape arbour in the fading light, picking at the figs and slices of apricot.

Marta reminded her of Lizzy, she now realised. She was older than Jessica by 20 years, but her youthful enthusiasm and quick, fiery intelligence gave her the aura of a much younger woman. Perhaps it was this resemblance that had drawn Jessica to her when she'd first come to the island the previous spring. The reason they'd become friends.

Jessica recalled one of the last times she'd seen Lizzy, in a small theatre in London. Just a month after graduating, it was Lizzy's first big break, playing Nerissa in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Jessica could still picture Lizzy's face, radiant under the stage lights, her eyes flashing with anger at her stage lover, Gratiano, who had disappointed her in love.

Now, Jessica picked up her mobile and scrolled through her contacts. She still had a number for Lizzy, although it was probably out of date.

She hovered over Lizzy's photo for a while, noting with a pang of nostalgia her impish smile and her unruly dark hair, the hint of vulnerability in her expression. Lizzy would be different now, Jessica imagined, now that she was an up-and-coming actor with a whole new set of glamorous friends. She thought about Aiden, the handsome fellow actor Lizzy had been dating at the time of their quarrel.

She racked her brain for something she could write in a text message. Something casual, yet poignant. Something that might remind Lizzy of how close they'd once been. She recalled Marta's advice from earlier that day…

'Present her with a good memory. Let her know you've been thinking about her in a positive way.'

Jessica began to type…

Dear Lizzy, something incredible happened today. I found a message in a bottle and it immediately made me think of you…

Once she'd finished typing, Jessica's finger hovered over the 'Send' button. She visualised Lizzy discovering the message and disregarding it, then turning to the far more important and exciting messages from her actor and director friends.

> *'I wasn't proud of how I'd behaved'*

'What have I got to lose?' she sighed, and clicked on 'Send' before she could change her mind.

* * * *

In the morning, when Jessica stepped outside, the dogs and the chickens had woken up, and they took turns calling to each other across the valley.

She took her mobile out of her shorts pocket and noticed that a message had come through while she'd been in the shower. It was from Lizzy. Her heart leapt as she clicked onto the message. Surely this was a good sign?

The text was brief. Lizzy expressed some interest in the message-in-the-bottle story, but certainly didn't appear to be as enthralled as Jessica had been. She apologised for the brevity of her message, saying she was incredibly busy on the set of the soap. Before signing off, she said it was good to hear from Jessica and that they should catch up properly soon.

Jessica felt certain she was being given the brush-off and was surprised at how upset she felt. Lizzy clearly didn't need her in her life, and it was obvious that hearing from Jessica hadn't been the highlight of her day.

'Why would she be interested in hearing from me anyway?' Jessica thought miserably.

She dropped onto the swinging chair and stared blindly across the citrus orchards. A stripe of smoke lay across the slope of the mountains, which were already awash with sunlight. But this morning, the beauty of the Tramuntanas was lost on Jessica. It was only just beginning to dawn on her that she may have lost her best friend forever.

TO BE CONTINUED

Amanda Batham, 2023

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Book club

Zoe West picks the best reads for you

The Memory of Animals

THE MEMORY OF ANIMALS
CLAIRE FULLER
WINNER OF THE COSTA NOVEL AWARD 2021

by Claire Fuller (£16.99, HB, Fig Tree)

Neffy, a patient in a sealed medical unit, wakes from illness to find a virus has wiped out almost everybody. So far, so scary. Four others have survived too – but can Neffy trust them, and what happens when their food runs out? A gripping page-turner, this apocalyptic tale is given warmth and depth by the portrayal of Neffy, a young woman with a complicated past to which she returns to escape the horrors of the present.

The Half Burnt House

by Alex North (£14.99, HB, Penguin)

In 2000, teenager Chris Shaw survived a brutal attack, leaving him not only with physical and mental scars, but on a downward spiral into drugs and crime. Over the years, his estranged sister Katie feels guilty for not protecting her younger brother, but is unwilling to get involved in his shady lifestyle. When CCTV footage links Chris to the murder of Professor Hobbes, she realises that he may be in danger again. The police investigation uncovers disturbing details, which further connect Chris to the professor and his obsession with a 1950s' serial killer. Can Katie prove her brother's innocence? Complex, tense and atmospheric.

Woman's Weekly LOVES

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE WHISPER MAN
ALEX NORTH
THE HALF BURNT HOUSE

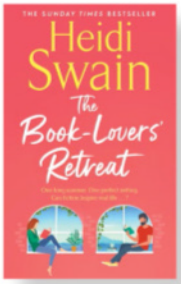
A Secret Garden Affair

Erica JAMES
THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
A SECRET GARDEN AFFAIR

by Erica James (£14.99, HB, HarperCollins)

Sometimes the people who are supposed to love you are the ones who hurt you the most. In 1981, when Libby's fiance cheats on her just weeks before their wedding, she flees to the Suffolk countryside – to Larkspur House, the home of her great-aunt Bess and lifelong friend, celebrated garden designer, Elfrida Ambrose. While they both welcome Libby and try to help heal her broken heart, her arrival stirs up their own memories, reigniting powerful emotions that have shaped the lives of the two elderly ladies. Through confronting and making peace with things that have happened, they begin to help Libby construct a new future for herself. A story of love and friendship.

The Book-Lovers' Retreat



by Heidi Swain (£8.99, PB, Simon & Schuster)

Ever loved a book so much you've wanted to live it? For friends Emily, Rachel and Tori, they do just that when they visit a cottage in the Lake District where *Hope Falls* – their favourite book – is being made into a film. With six weeks ahead of them, maybe they can each deal with their life choices and the turning points they face in their futures. But when Tori drops out and another *Hope Falls* aficionado steps in, will the holiday take an unforeseen turn? Gorgeous summer read.

Homecoming

KATE MORTON
Homecoming

by Kate Morton (£20, HB, Pan Macmillan)

It's 1959, in Tambilla, South Australia. On Christmas Eve, a horrific discovery is made. On the grounds of a grand mansion, the remains of a murder victim are found beside a creek. In 2018, in Sydney, Jess rushes to meet her grandmother Nora, who is frail after suffering a fall. While staying in Nora's home, she uncovers a shocking link between her family and an unresolved murder case… This nerve-jangling thriller will chill you to the bone.

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Woman's Weekly
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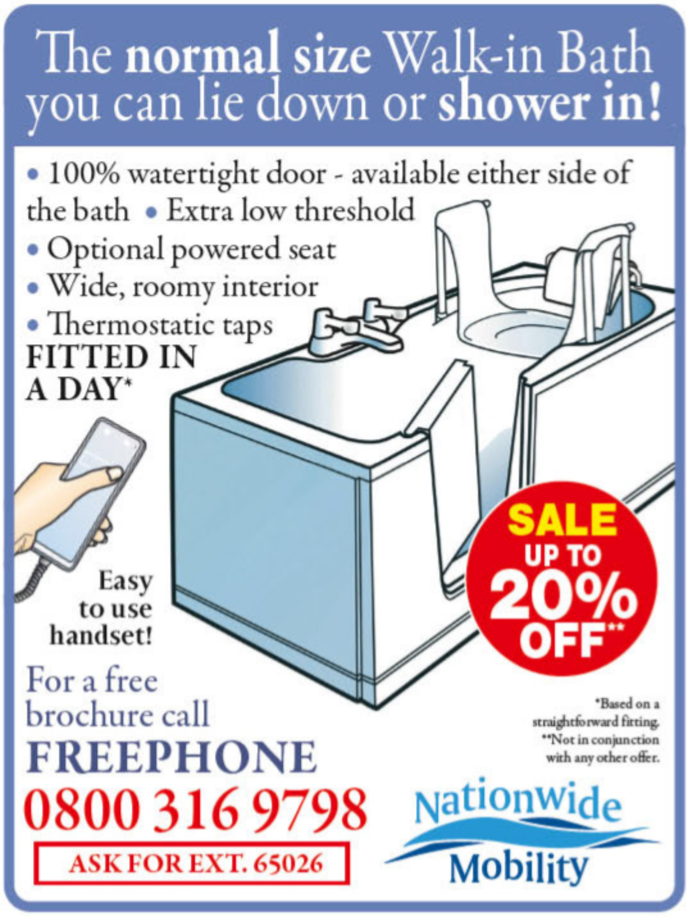

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Puzzle TIME

Wordwise

You have 15 minutes to find as many words as possible using the letters in the grid. Each word must contain four or more letters, one of which must be the central square. No proper nouns, plurals or foreign words are allowed. There is one nine-letter word in the grid, for which the clue is: **Five-pointed star.**

E E L
N **G** N
T P A

Average = 15
More than 25 = well done

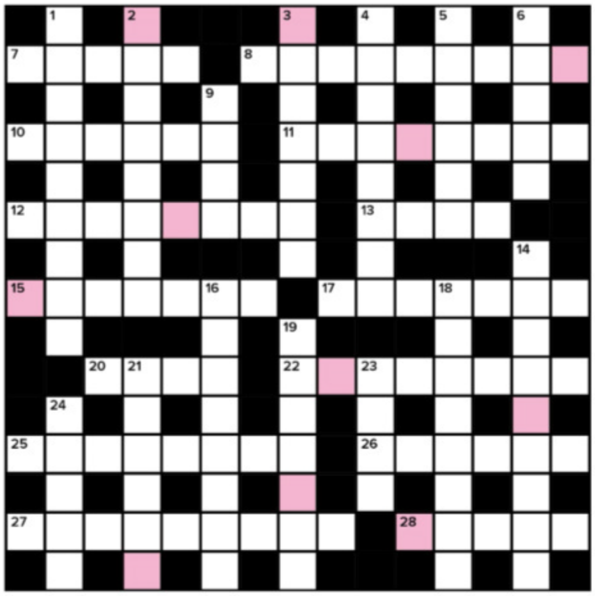
LINKWORDS

Fit 10 words into the grid so that each links with the end of the word on its left and the beginning of the one on the right. Then unscramble the letters in the shaded squares to make a word.
CLUE: A raincoat.

FILTER		▨					**BEAN**
PINHOLE			▨				**-SHY**
WALKIE				▨			**FILM**
BROWSER			▨				**PANE**
BILL			▨				**PAINT**
RASPBERRY		▨					**EFFECT**
SLEEPY	▨						**PROMISE**
STONE		▨					**UP**
DOCTOR				▨			**CHILD**
ACTION-			▨				**LUNCH**

Crossword

Try the easy or cryptic clues, then rearrange the letters in the shaded squares for the answer.
CLUE: Musical instruments terribly sharp with one group of notes (11).



EASY CLUES

Across

7 Massage (5)
8 Leftover amount (9)
10 Halted (6)
11 Least heavy (8)
12 Towards the Antarctic (8)
13 Vulgar (4)
15 Is contingent (7)
17 Cleared one's throat (7)
20 Fling (4)
22 On a higher floor (8)
25 Musical events (8)
26 Principally (6)
27 All individuals (9)
28 Quarrel (5)

Down

11 Letter containers (9)
2 Plastic cartridge (8)
3 Winding (7)
4 Marsupial (8)
5 Together (6)
6 Detect (5)
9 Advantage (4)
14 Fuel (9)
16 Give an account (8)
18 Masses of ice (8)
19 External (7)
21 Happens (6)
23 Several (4)
24 Figure out (5)

CRYPTIC CLUES

Across

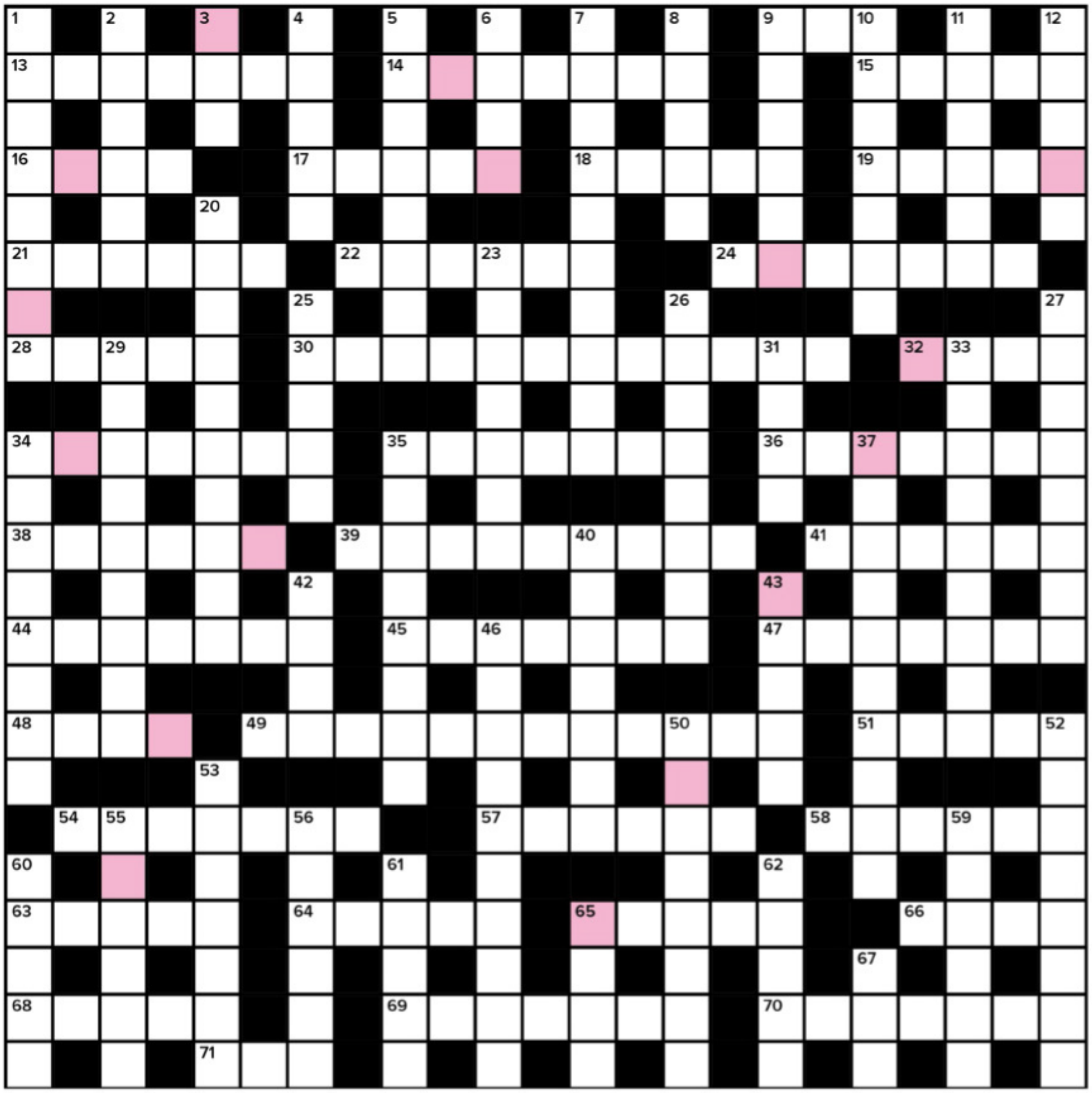
7 Manipulate what's essential to the audience (5)
8 Prompt to have a rest (9)
10 Charlie relaxed and stopped (6)
11 Part of flight estimated to have the least baggage (8)
12 Ten hours travelling in one direction (8)
13 Cheeky prude going topless (4)
15 Relies upon swimming-pool sections to be without an echo (7)
17 Showed signs of illness after cooking huge cod (7)
20 Throw in the direction of steamship (4)
22 Exotic USA trips involving part of the house (8)
25 Performances once taken in by curates regularly (8)
26 For the most part, it's masculine to embrace one (6)
27 Each person found in flipping lovely do by revellers (9)
28 Dispute with a loveless rogue (5)

Down

1 Naughty elves open stationery (9)
2 Tessa turned back time in church with retro music source (8)
3 Staggering fish found in a circle (7)
4 A-OK gran altered old jumper (8)
5 As one head of university getting honoured on the radio (6)
6 Sight, maybe, to see about the poles (5)
9 Border of hedges getting trimmed (4)
14 Our temple gets ruined by crude oil (9)
16 Outline of French writer (8)
18 Endlessly large ice sheets, primarily, put another way? (8)
19 Disqualified team, on the surface (7)
21 Takes place of wilted crocus (6)
23 A portion of the total, we hear (4)
24 Work out alone, taking five (5)

Jumbo puzzle

Read down the letters in the shaded squares to spell out a breed of dog (9,7).



ACROSS

9 Actor/writer, Stephen ___ (3)
13 Make discoveries (7)
14 Bellowing (7)
15 Longbow's missile (5)
16 Playfully roguish (4)
17 Dense (5)
18 Alliance (5)
19 Naming words (5)
21 DIY tool (6)
22 Road (6)
24 Takeaway type (7)
28 Arc (5)
30 Now and then (12)
32 Capital of Italy (4)
34 Develops into (7)
35 Ironed (7)
36 Item (7)
38 Railway locomotive (6)
39 Young adults (9)
41 Shirt part (6)
44 Parched (7)
45 European country (7)
47 Asks along (7)
48 At any time (4)
49 Personal freedom (12)
51 Step (5)
54 Neatened by cutting (7)
57 Not far away (6)
58 Eats greedily (6)
63 More pleasant (5)
64 Musical speed (5)
65 Pass on (5)
66 In addition (4)
68 Theme (5)
69 Formal assembly (7)
70 Tapers (7)
71 Wonder (3)

DOWN

1 Tinny (8)
2 Separated out (6)
3 Not me! (3)
4 Thaws (5)
5 Having a creative skill (8)
6 Status (4)
7 Occasions (10)
8 Encore (5)
9 European language (6)
10 Gaping (7)
11 Cliques (6)
12 Rotate (5)
20 Resolves (10)
23 From the east (7)
25 Dwelling (5)
26 Roamed (8)
27 Football officials (8)
29 Identify (9)
31 Jump vigorously (4)
33 Group of musicians (9)
34 Inhales (8)
35 Went before (8)
37 The small screen (10)
40 Older relative (7)
42 Song of praise (4)
43 Mature (5)
46 Garden structure (10)
50 Taking small bites (8)
52 Reply (8)
53 Country (7)
55 Cooking instructions (6)
56 Landed property (6)
59 Eight pints (6)
60 Tangles (5)
61 Break violently (5)
62 Fibbing (5)
65 Track for wheels (4)
67 Weep (3)

*** Find the puzzle answers on the horoscopes page.**

YOU CAN WORK IT OUT...

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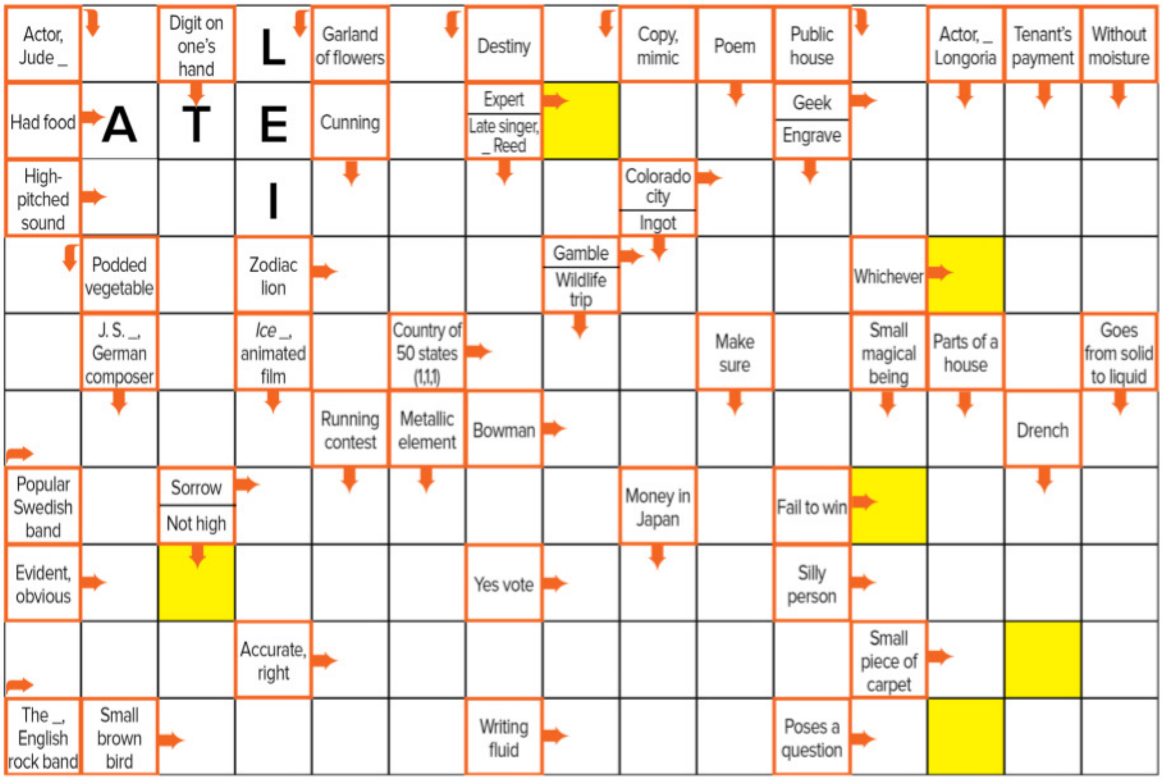
Puzzle TIME

Arrow word

Discovered by Heinrich Olbers in 1802, what name from Greek mythology was given to the second ever asteroid to be identified? Solve the puzzle by following the arrows and writing in your answers. Then, read down the letters in the shaded squares to find the answer.

YOUR ANSWER:


Actor, Jude _
Digit on one's hand
L
Garland of flowers
Destiny
Copy, mimic
Poem
Public house
Actor, _ Longoria
Tenant's payment
Without moisture
Had food
A
T
E
Cunning
Expert
Late singer, _ Reed
Geek
Engrave
High-pitched sound
I
Colorado city
Ingot
Podded vegetable
Zodiac lion
Gamble
Wildlife trip
Whichever
J. S. _, German composer
Ice _, animated film
Country of 50 states (1,1,1)
Make sure
Small magical being
Parts of a house
Goes from solid to liquid
Running contest
Metallic element
Bowman
Drench
Popular Swedish band
Sorrow
Not high
Money in Japan
Fail to win
Evident, obvious
Yes vote
Silly person
Accurate, right
Small piece of carpet
The _, English rock band
Small brown bird
Writing fluid
Poses a question

WORDSEARCH

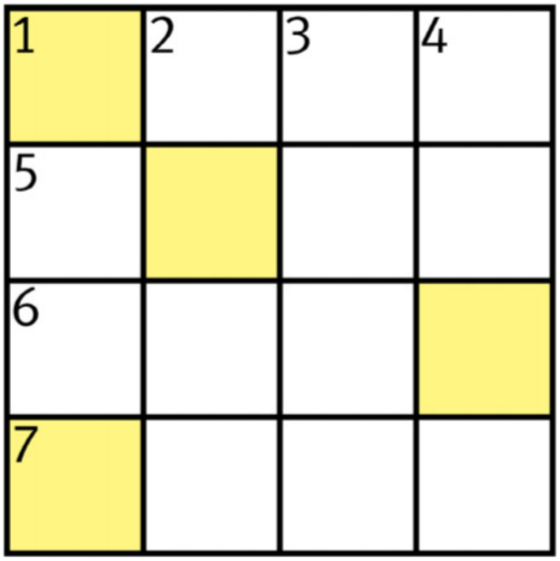
Governor Mark Dayton of Minnesota officially declared 23 May 2016 as the 'Day' of which artist ahead of a concert in Minneapolis? The answer is the one missing from the grid. The answer is the one missing from the grid.

M	R	D	A	R	I	U	S	O
B	I	T	A	U	G	E	B	A
U	H	K	T	D	S	M	L	S
S	A	I	A	S	E	H	U	I
T	N	X	G	N	T	L	E	S
E	N	P	I	N	K	E	E	R
D	A	M	C	F	L	Y	P	X
W	E	S	T	L	I	F	E	S
C	O	L	D	P	L	A	Y	M

YOUR ANSWER:

- ADELE
- BEYONCE
- BLUE
- BUSTED
- COLDPLAY
- DARIUS
- EMINEM
- MCFLY
- MIKA
- OASIS
- PINK
- RIHANNA
- STEPS
- USHER
- WESTLIFE

Mini crossword



The shaded boxes spell out a word.

ACROSS
1 Nagging pain (4)
5 Talon (4)
6 Accept (4)
7 Practise boxing (4)

DOWN
1 Performs (4)
2 Applaud (4)
3 Maori war dance (4)
4 Water jug (4)

Your stars

For 19-25 April with Bracha Goldsmith

yourastrologysigns.com

ARIES 21 MAR – 20 APR
This is a good time to explore new work opportunities. Do your research and you could be onto a winner.

TAURUS 21 APR – 21 MAY
Your home is the highlight for you right now. You may be making changes or upgrades, or simply doing a great deal of sorting out.

GEMINI 22 MAY – 21 JUN
Creatively your energies are productive. Whatever you enjoy can be turned into a business with some focused attention.

CANCER 22 JUN – 23 JUL
Give yourself plenty of time between all appointments and schedules. That way you can relax if any delays occur.

LEO 24 JUL – 23 AUG
You may be planning a trip to somewhere completely different. Search out new people and exciting cultures.

VIRGO 24 AUG – 23 SEP
Financially, you may be examining all kinds of options. There are always several solutions to any situation. Try to look at them all.

LIBRA 24 SEP – 23 OCT
Relationships may be changing as you're making many internal changes. Allow people to come in and out of your life freely.

SCORPIO 24 OCT – 22 NOV
If you're looking for love, this could be your lucky week! Make sure you're proactive and put yourself in places where you can meet someone new.

SAGITTARIUS 23 NOV – 21 DEC
Someone from your past may come back into your life. This might be only for a short spell, or it could be forever!

CAPRICORN 22 DEC – 20 JAN
Question everything over and over again. Do not take things at face value. If something doesn't feel right, don't do it.

AQUARIUS 21 JAN – 19 FEB
Go within, rather than without. All your answers are inside of you if you take the time to sit quietly and peacefully and listen to yourself.

PISCES 20 FEB – 20 MAR
Now you have a chance to develop new and healthy habits with respect to your body and your wellbeing.

PUZZLE ANSWERS

JUMBO PUZZLE ACROSS: 9 Fry **13** Explore **14** Roaring **15** Arrow **16** Arch **17** Thick **18** Union **19** Nouns **21** Ladder **22** Street **24** Chinese **28** Curve **30** Occasionally **32** Rome **34** Becomes **35** Pressed **36** Article **38** Engine **39** Teenagers **41** Sleeve **44** Thirsty **45** England **47** Invites **48** Ever **49** Independence **51** Stair **54** Trimmed **57** Nearby **58** Gorges **63** Nicer **64** Tempo **65** Relay **66** Also **68** Topic **69** Session **70** Narrows **71** Awe
DOWN: 1 Metallic **2** Spaced **3** You **4** Melts **5** Artistic **6** Rank **7** Situations **8** Again **9** French **10** Yawning **11** Groups **12** Twist **20** Determines **23** Eastern **25** House **26** Wandered **27** Referees **29** Recognise **31** Leap **33** Orchestra **34** Breathes **35** Preceded **37** Television **40** Grandma **42** Hymn **43** Ripen **46** Greenhouse **50** Nibbling **52** Response **53** America **55** Recipe **56** Estate **59** Gallon **60** Knots **61** Smash **62** Lying **65** Rail **67** Cry
Answer: YORKSHIRE TERRIER

CROSSWORD ACROSS: 7 Knead **8** Remainder **10** Ceased **11** Lightest **12** Southern **13** Rude **15** Depends **17** Coughed **20** Toss **22** Upstairs **25** Concerts **26** Mainly **27** Everybody **28** Argue
DOWN: 1 Envelopes **2** Cassette **3** Reeling **4** Kangaroo **5** United **6** Sense **9** Edge **14** Petroleum **16** Describe **18** Glaciers **19** Outside **21** Occurs **23** Some **24** Solve **Answer:** HARPSICHORD

LINKWORDS COFFEE, CAMERA, TALKIE, WINDOW, POSTER, RIPPLE, HOLLOW, WASHED, FOSTER, PACKED **Answer:** MACKINTOSH

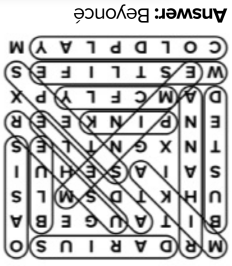
WORDWISE Agent, aglet, angel, angle, eagle, eaglet, elegant, entangle, gale, gannet, gape, gate, gean, gelt, gene, genet, gent, gentle, glean, glee, glen, gnat, legate, negate, page, pang, pelage, plangent, tang, tangle
Answer: PENTANGLE

MINI XWORD

A	C	H	E
C	L	A	W
T	A	K	E
S	P	A	R

Answer: Ales

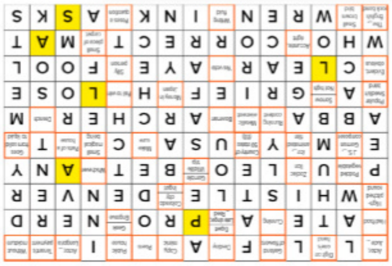
WORDSEARCH



M	R	D	A	R	I	U	S	O
B	I	T	A	U	G	E	B	A
U	H	K	T	D	S	M	L	S
S	A	I	A	S	E	H	U	I
T	N	X	G	N	T	L	E	S
E	N	P	I	N	K	E	E	R
D	A	M	C	F	L	Y	P	X
W	E	S	T	L	I	F	E	S
C	O	L	D	P	L	A	Y	M

Answer: Beyoncé

ARROW WORD **Answer:** Pallas



IN YOUR NEXT ISSUE

SIMPLE STEPS TO YOUNGER-LOOKING SKIN

GREAT BRITISH PUD RECIPES

FABULOUS HOME UPDATES ON A BUDGET

LOVELY LAUNDRY MAKES TO SEW

ON SALE 26 April

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ipso. Regulated

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ROSEMARY

Speaking ill of THE LIVING

A case of oversharing at the doctors

'Do you come here often?' I've been asked this a few times over the years, but never in a hospital waiting room.

'Oh,' I replied. 'Something like every six months. Just routine. Could be worse. How about you?'

My new friend was a man in his mid-70s, at a guess. He had rather wild hair, and eyebrows that could probably be seen from space.

He was wearing dark red corduroy trousers, and a V-neck pullover with holes in it. And he was very chatty.

'Oh, I'm always here,' he said. 'I might as well set up a bed in reception, and take my meals in the coffee shop. If it's not blood tests, it's my eyes, and then there's the clinic for the old waterworks.'

> *'I tried not to think about his waterworks'*

I nodded sympathetically and tried not to think about his old waterworks. Is it normal to discuss this sort of thing within two minutes of meeting somebody? I suppose that, in a hospital waiting room, anything goes.

'It's age, I suppose. We're all falling apart, aren't we, or we wouldn't be here. What's your trouble then? If you don't mind my asking.'

On saying this, he fished an elaborately patterned handkerchief from his top pocket and blew his nose at about five on the Richter scale.

A lady on my right-hand side leaned across me to remonstrate. 'That's not very hygienic, is it?' she said. 'You shouldn't be waving your hanky about like that. We don't want your germs.'

'My dear lady,' said Mr Chatty, 'Even I don't want my germs. If you felt I was waving them in your direction, please accept my apology. I was, however, most careful.'

He looked at me. 'Did you not think I was most careful?'

'I wasn't watching, to be honest.'

'Some of us here are regulars,' said the lady. 'We deserve a little respect. I get dizzy spells you know.'

'I too am cursed with dizzy spells,' said Mr Chatty. 'On top of my other little problems.'

'Do they come at you all of a sudden?' said the lady. 'One moment you're just sitting down, and the next you've come over all strange.'

'You could be describing my symptoms to the letter,' said Mr Chatty. 'It's our age, I suppose.'

'I'm only 58,' said the lady. 'That's no age at all. Isn't it no age at all?'

That last question was aimed at me, piggy in the middle.

'No, I don't suppose it is,' I said. 'No age at all. Not these days.'

'I'm 79,' said Mr Chatty. 'You'd never believe I was 79, would you?'

'No,' I lied. 'Definitely not.'

Every six months or so I trot along here to have my blood examined by a doctor, who always – touch wood – says that it's in tip-top shape, and then we talk about baking, which is her hobby.

As hospital trips go, it is relatively painless. The people who take my blood are delightful. I hear all about their children (doing well at school) and husbands (often grumpy because their football teams have forgotten how to win).

No, it's the other patients who are occasionally difficult. They are so keen to share. Whatever happened to our famous reserve and stiff upper lip?

'These seats could be more comfortable, don't you think?' said the lady. 'I've lost all the feeling in my bottom.'

'I don't wish to know about your bottom,' said Mr Chatty, who whispered to me, 'Some people will share anything, won't they?' You might think this is a bit rich, coming from somebody who was just telling me about his 'waterworks'.

'I was only saying,' said the lady. 'Anyway, there's nothing rude about bottoms. Not these days. Years ago, of course, well, my mother couldn't say bottom without blushing. She was very innocent.'

Have you ever found yourself trapped in a conversation, with no apparent means of escape? You can imagine my delight then to hear the magic words 'Rosemary Dear. Rosemary Dear'. It was my turn for the needle, and I was out of my seat like a shot.

For all I know, Mr Chatty and his friend are still there, swapping stories about their various ailments.

I read recently – and it might even have been in a waiting room magazine – that people are at their happiest at the age of 69, despite their bad backs, dizzy spells and the fact that they can't get up from a chair without saying, 'Ooh, dearie me.'

If that's true, why do I never meet any of them?'

Rosie xx

ILLUSTRATION: JOY GOSNEY

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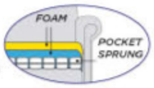
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